IS CLINTON'S PLAN A WINDFALL FOR THE WEALTHY?

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THE MUSICAL TYRANT

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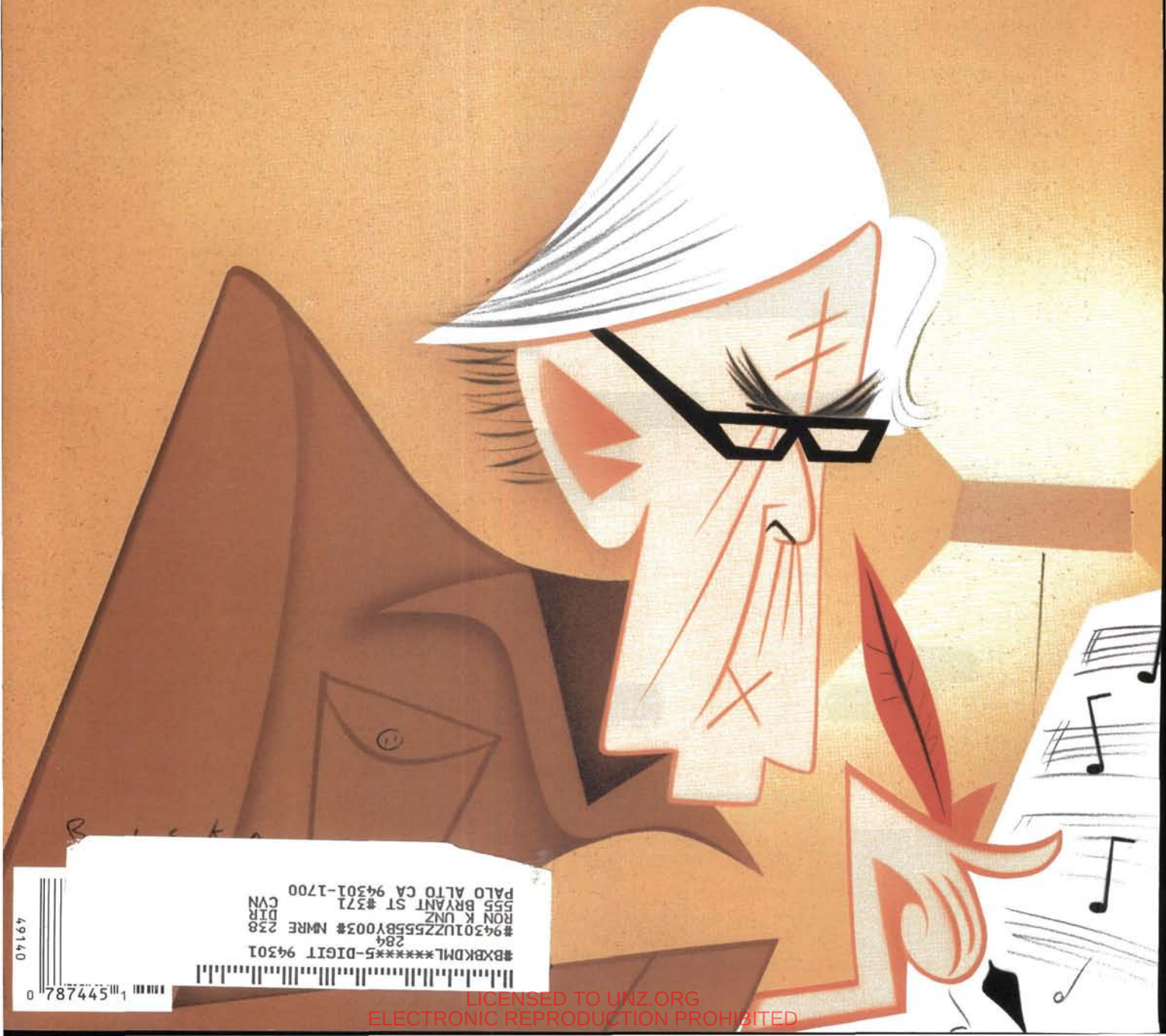

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Where We Stand

By Albert Shanker, President
American Federation of Teachers

Telling Half the Story

One of the things that has most impressed people about the work of social scientists John Chubb and Terry Moe is their scientific expertise. Instead of just asserting that children would get a better education if we sent them to private schools, their book *Politics, Markets and America's Schools* offers many pages of data analysis to *prove* their point. But real scientists follow the evidence wherever it leads. When they find data that contradict or raise questions about their theories, they acknowledge this fact and modify their theories to be consistent with the new evidence. If we look closely at Chubb and Moe's work—at what they gloss over or omit—it turns out that it is more casuistry than science. They do not develop a theory about school performance based on evidence. Instead, they selectively muster whatever evidence supports their preconceived conclusions about vouchers and "market schools."

It is often assumed that kids get a better education in private or parochial schools than in public schools. This is mere assumption since private and parochial schools seldom release test scores—and do not necessarily use the same tests as public schools.

Recently, however, we were able to make some real comparisons when the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) released the results of its 1990 math exam. NAEP found that math achievement scores in private and parochial schools were very close to those in public schools, particularly for 17-year-olds. Indeed, when you take into account the differences between private and public school students, it is amazing how close the scores were. Private and parochial schools can reject whomever they please, the majority require some sort of examination to get in, and they generally don't keep you if you don't do your homework or if you turn out to be a discipline problem. There are very few handicapped youngsters in private and parochial schools, and the parents of private school students are much less likely to be high school dropouts and much more likely to have graduated from college than public school parents.

In a *Wall Street Journal* article (July, 26, 1991), Chubb and Moe discounted the closeness of the NAEP scores. One of the major reasons they offered was the fact that a large number of kids leave private school after eighth grade and go to public high school. This, they said, tends to elevate public school scores.

When real scientists find data that raise questions about their theories, they acknowledge this fact and modify their theories to be consistent with the new evidence.

More recently, at a conference I was attending, Chubb presented a new paper that he and Terry Moe have written. It cites data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of the Eighth Grade Class of 1988 (NELS:88), which, according to Chubb and Moe, supports their contention about private school achievement. NELS:88 tested a large group of students in eighth grade and again in tenth grade and found that the youngsters in private schools had made much greater gains than public school students. However, this turns out to be only half the story.

A whopping 37 percent of students left parochial school for public school after eighth grade. Who were these kids? Nearly half—47 percent—came from families in the lowest 25 percent in terms of socioeconomic status. Since socioeconomic status (SES) correlates with student achievement, the large number of low SES students leaving parochial school in eighth grade was certain to raise parochial school scores. And the large number of these kids entering public school was almost certain to depress public school scores—exactly the opposite result from the one Chubb and Moe claimed in the *Wall Street Journal* article.

In their recent paper, Chubb and Moe use NELS:88 data showing greater improvement in private than public school scores between eighth and tenth grade to assert the superiority of private schools. Impossible to miss but totally left out of their discussion was that the transfer of low SES students certainly elevated private school scores and almost certainly lowered public school scores. It's as though they were comparing the health records of a private and public hospital and claiming the private hospital had a better record even though they knew that the private hospital screened its patients in the first place and then sent the ones who had the most serious diseases (and couldn't pay) to the public hospital. What Chubb and Moe are doing here is clearly not social science. It represents a selective mustering of the evidence to support a conclusion they have already reached and a suppressing or ignoring of evidence that contradicts it.

Chubb and Moe are entitled to their opinions, but it's time for them to drop their pretense of objectivity and admit that, when they talk about market schools, they are speaking as partisans for vouchers and not as disinterested social scientists.

Mr. Shanker's comments appear in this ad under the auspices of the American Federation of Teachers. Reader correspondence is invited. Address your letters to Mr. Shanker at the AFT, 555 New Jersey Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20001. © 1993 by Albert Shanker.

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Cover by Robert Risko for THE NEW REPUBLIC. Article on page 26.

4 **CORRESPONDENCE** In defense of creeping Rodhamism, "Liberators" &c.

6 **MICKEY KAUS** TRB: SUCH A DEAL? The Republican line on the deficit is bunk.

7 **THE EDITORS** SO NEAR, SO FAR Why Clinton's economic plan was too cautious.

8 **NOTEBOOK** Unemployment at the National Archives, Strobe Talbott's lie &c.

9 **FRED BARNES** WHITE HOUSE WATCH: BI-IDEOLOGICAL Clinton's rhetorical strategy.

10 **PATRICK GLYNN** NOT BUSH A defense of Clinton's emerging Balkan policy.

11 **DAVID KAY** BOMB SHELTER An investigator's troubling report from Iraq.

13 **ROBERT BAZELL** SCIENCE AND SOCIETY: GROWTH INDUSTRY The more the cancer bureaucracy expands, the less it seems to accomplish.

14 **RUTH SHALIT** DISEMPOWERED The back-biting fizzle of Empower America.

17 **ROBERT S. McINTYRE** THROWN FOR A LOOP Is Clinton's plan a windfall for the wealthy? A close analysis of the new tax structure suggests so.

18 **JAMES BOVARD** WHEAT AND CHAFF Clinton's farm cuts disappear on inspection.

20 **JOHN B. JUDIS** THE JOBLESS RECOVERY The president is desperately pushing his stimulus package to increase jobs, despite the well-advanced recovery. But what if the trend toward jobless growth is extremely deep-seated?

24 **STANLEY KAUFFMANN** ON FILMS: FANTASY AND FANDOM *Love Field* strains; *Groundhog Day* doesn't.

26 **RICHARD TARUSKIN** NO EAR FOR MUSIC John Cage was a frightening musical phenomenon: a composer who relentlessly and nonchalantly followed his own subversive rules wherever they led him.

35 **MOSHE HALBERTAL** THE SCOURGE OF REASON *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State* by Yeshayahu Leibowitz, edited by Eliezer Goldman

38 **CRAIG SELIGMAN** SENTIMENTAL WOUNDS *The English Patient* by Michael Ondaatje

41 **RACHEL HADAS** POEM *A Glimpse of Simon Verity*

42 **ANN HULBERT** WASHINGTON DIARIST: OFF THE CHARTS

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CORRESPONDENCE

Creeping Rodhamism?

To the editors:

Et tu Mickey? Just when we thought TNR was above this silly misogynistic Hillary-bashing, we see Kaus's "Thinking about Hillary" (TRB, February 15). With the exception of the few words devoted to a discussion of Hillary Clinton's political beliefs, the column was petty and sexist. It bemoans the fact that in a 1988 interview she spoke out of turn and was rude. I have yet to see a male politician accused of this. Hillary is criticized for giving a false image of herself during the presidential campaign, in particular for dropping the name Rodham and then reusing it as a middle name. This is unfair; everyone knows campaigns are about image-making and the selective emphasis of certain aspects of one's persona and political record.

Finally, you complain that Hillary "hitched herself" to her husband's career, yet "tries to have it both ways" by insisting on independence as well, and that she is therefore a "false feminist." Surely, however, you are aware that many men take advantage of family connections without being labeled "non-independent." Should the Kennedys and Rockefellers all have eschewed politics so as not to take advantage of their family connections?

NANCY E. BENNET
Holden, Massachusetts

To the editors:

After reading "Thinking of Hillary" I've come to the conclusion that Mickey Kaus is jealous of Hillary Clinton. Until we elect a woman or an openly gay man to run the country, presidential spouse will remain the only job in the country that a man can't have. When being First Lady meant giving up one's birth name and subsuming one's identity in the president's, guys didn't seem to want the job. Now that the position includes some nice perks, such as a better office, men like Kaus wish they were in bed with the president.

GINA FATTORE
Chicago, Illinois

"Liberated"

To the editors:

Jeffrey Goldberg's article "The Exaggerators" (February 8) regarding black liberators completely misses the point. Tucson's Holocaust Education Speakers' Bureau has been taking the lessons of the Holocaust to more than 5,000 schoolchildren for a dozen years. The bureau has two kinds of direct witnesses to the horrors of the Holocaust: the survivors who experienced the concentration camps and the American soldiers who went into the camps and saw the horrors firsthand. The exact moment of entry into the camps is unimportant.

The word "liberator" can and should be used for every American soldier who fought to break the Nazi war machine. The term has come to refer to those who were first into the camps *while the survivors were still there.* However, to some the word mistakenly evokes the image of hand-to-hand battle and therefore misleads them as to its usage. General Dwight D. Eisenhower did not enter a camp at the precise moment of liberation. In fact he said, "I made the visit deliberately, in order to be in a position to give firsthand evidence of these things if ever, in the future, there develops a tendency to charge these allegations merely to 'propaganda.'" This does not make him any less of a liberator.

Perhaps the term "liberator" has only been applied to those who were witnesses, for lack of a better word, to separate their experiences from the thousands of American soldiers who contributed to the defeat of the Nazis. But let us not allow semantics to get in the way of the essential truth. Members of the American armed forces destroyed the Nazis and liberated, freed, rescued—what difference does it make?—the victims who were barely still alive. That is the only issue.

MARJORIE FENTON
Jewish Community Relations Council
Tucson, Arizona

To the editors:

Nina Rosenblum's comments to Jeffrey Goldberg regarding those who criticize the accuracy of her film "Liberators" are ugly, divisive and patently untrue.

To say that those who disagree with the facts of her film "Liberators" "are [of] the same mentality that says that the Holocaust didn't happen" and are racists insults the bravery of the black soldiers who fought so heroically during World War II despite the racism they encountered. "To think black people are less, which is what most Jewish people think," is an odious canard.

The soldiers of the 761st Tank Battalion are living witnesses to history, and any tampering with the facts aids and abets Holocaust revisionists.

MELVIN SALBERG
ABRAHAM H. FOXMAN
Anti-Defamation League
New York, New York

Benevolent dictator

To the editors:

Gustavo Gorriti's all-out attack on Peru's President Alberto Fujimori ("The Unshining Path," February 8) would have been far more credible had he not added: "The Bush administration, which initially rejected the coup ... shifted soon afterward, saying that Fujimori was the only game in town and a guarantee of stability. *(Translation: someone over whom the United States has influence.)*" (My italics.) That is a comforting view of U.S. foreign policy for those who are convinced that the U.S. is principally responsible for Latin America's failures. Fortunately, Latin American intellectuals increasingly recognize that Latin America's problems are rooted in traditional Ibero-American culture—its anti-progress values, attitudes and institutions—not in "Yankee imperialism" or its less extreme counterpart, "Yankee hegemony."

LAWRENCE E. HARRISON
Vineyard Haven, Massachusetts

To the editors:

It is with great consternation that I have read Gustavo Gorriti's article. It is not up to me to defend President Fujimori, but I feel obligated to defend my country in terms of what is right and true. There is no evident "increase" in human rights violations or "widespread persecution" of the opposition, as Gorriti contends.

THE NEW REPUBLIC is not alone. On December 27 Gorriti published an article in *The New York Times* saying, among other pearls, that "there is no independent or opposition journalist who had not been threatened, harassed or kidnapped." As an independent journalist I have dozens of friends in the working press who have no problems at all.

Gorriti, like an echo of our renowned writer and defeated presidential candidate Mario Vargas Llosa, lives abroad demanding the political and economical isolation of Peru. Maybe both could get a better perspective if they visit more often to talk to a wide range of impartial people, and not only to each other or to the political leaders of some of the traditional parties who have lost their constituencies.

JORGE E. SEOANE MORLA
Lima, Peru

Gustavo Gorriti replies:

Jorge Seoane Morla is a good example of the kind of "independent" journalist the Fujimori regime is trying to breed. He earns a good part of his livelihood selling communications equipment to the Peruvian government, and he is also the landlord of the law offices of Vladimiro Montesinos, Fujimori's notorious right-hand man.

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Personality disorder

To the editors:

Although there may be good grounds for allowing openly gay men and women to serve their country, "Arms and the Men" (February 15)advanced an understanding of human identity and social relations that TNR has courageously opposed in the context of higher education.

You write that homosexuality is "constitutive of someone's deepest personal identity" and ranges the "full gamut of human experience." Homosexuality is not something that one chooses or a form of behavior, but rather is something one acquires by descent. Homosexuality in your view, therefore, functions much like ethnicity. The gay community constitutes a tribe that affiliates on the basis of an inherited trait.

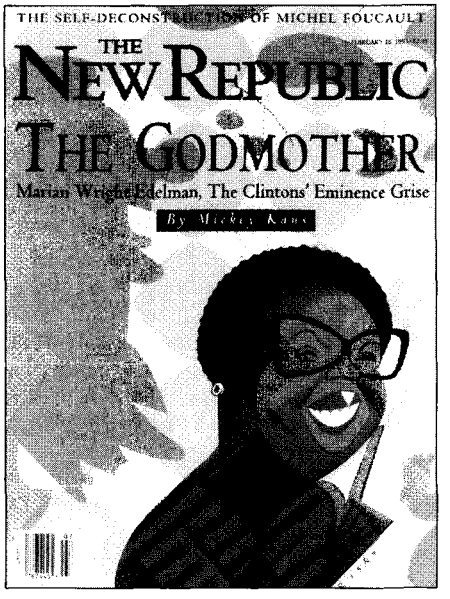
But this understanding of homosexuality, and the view of personal identity bound up with it, is precisely what TNR found objectionable about multiculturalism. Back in February 1991 ("The Derisory Tower") you wrote that multiculturalism in the academy was "one of the most destructive and demeaning orthodoxies of our time." Why was that? Because multiculturalism asserts that biological characteristics such as race are "determinant of a human being's mind, that the mind cannot, and should not, try to wrest itself from its biological or sociological origins." In that editorial and in that issue you illustrated how this perspective was balkanizing the university into a cacophony of rival claims rooted in race, gender and sexual orientation. Implicit in your argument was the idea—contra multiculturalism—that it is possible to find what is common or universal to human experience. And the mind, something that universities have traditionally nurtured, was one place to search for such unity.

If you objected to multiculturalism because the particularities of biological outlook are obscuring the common task of intellectual inquiry, how, then, can you hope that lifting the ban on gays in the military will advance Bill Clinton's vision of an integrated America? If homosexuality is not an act but an altogether different identity, won't such a basis for lifting the ban further balkanize the country? This is what makes the argument for gays in the military different from admitting blacks into the armed forces. The old argument of civil rights was not that blacks were different and therefore deserved special protection, but rather that blacks were similar to whites and therefore all areas of public life open to whites should be opened to blacks. In other words, blacks were integrated into the military on the basis of a shared human identity. The argument I hear you make is that gays are different from heterosexuals but should not be excluded on the basis of that difference. Would you suggest, then, separate barracks, bathrooms and dining halls for gays? And wouldn't such segregation take us further away from the integration you desire?

DARRYL G. HART
Wheaton, Illinois

To the editors:

What I resent about the current debate on gays in the military is that it does not deal with the proper fundamental assumption: namely, that there is something wrong with being homosexual, not something "evil" or something "depraved" or something "unholy" but something wrong. All of us have something wrong with us. Some of us are blind and so we cannot be bus drivers. Some of us have heart rhythm disturbances and so we cannot fly airplanes. Still others abuse cocaine and cannot work as crane operators. There is not anything depraved or evil or unholy about these people either, but there is something wrong with them.


THE SELF-DECONSTRUCTION OF MICHEL FOUCAULT
THE NEW REPUBLIC
THE GODMOTHER
Marian Wright Edelman, The Clintons' Eminence Grise
By Mickey Kaus

In previous articles you have articulated in horrid detail the inexcusable persecution and denial of fundamental decency that gay and lesbian soldiers have experienced in the military. I would not condone such mistreatment under any circumstance. For example, I would not condone such mistreatment of alcoholic soldiers who were revealed to be "closet drunks" or support their wholesale expulsion from the service, especially if they had exemplary records like many of our homosexual soldiers. However, I would deem their alcoholism as sufficient reason to transfer them to other positions, to restrict their possible occupations in the service and to expel them if their behavior warranted it. Furthermore, I certainly would not seek to recruit new alcoholics into the service.

I think that the future will show that homosexual activity is the least important aspect of being gay and that the depression, mental illness and substance abuse associated with the lifestyle cannot be fully accounted for by reaction to societal isolation and hostility. In short, homosexuality is a personality disorder at best and a mental illness at worst, and the military does not need any more mentally ill soldiers than it already has.

D. L. FORSTON, M.D.
Gary, Indiana

Distinct unease

To the editors:

I also attended the Conference on Basic Writing that James Traub reports on in "Back to Basic" (February 8), but I saw the conference as a pretty serious nuts-and-bolts, low-profile kind of affair, a gathering of teachers and scholars whose work is very often diminished by their mainstream academic colleagues precisely because it is *not* the kind of faddish theoretical shenanigans that journals like TNR seem to enjoy reviling as p.c. Yes, there was a good bit of talk about the "politics" of teaching writing, but most of this struck me as careful and informed.

The article by Professor Min-zhan Lu, who was awarded the Mina Shaughnessy Prize, is a close and sympathetic study of the tension in Shaughnessy's work between the desire to honor the ways of speaking that students bring with them to college and the need to help them learn to write in a very different idiom. I was at the luncheon when Lu was given her award, and my sense was that the editors presented it to her not with "distinct unease," as Traub puts it, but with distinct pleasure. I'm proud to be part of a field that is willing to look critically at the world of its most admired figures—since this strikes me as the exact opposite of "political correctness."

Words like "imperialism" were sometimes thrown around too casually at the conference, but that's news? Traub makes such small bits of silliness seem like they were just about the only things getting said. The Conference on Basic Writing is not the MLA. It's a group made up in very large part of assistant professors, untenured lecturers and part-time instructors—all of whom willingly teach (often for terrible pay) courses and students that many of their senior colleagues wouldn't go near. So, guys, next time why don't you pick on somebody your own size?

JOSEPH HARRIS
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

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FROM WASHINGTON

Such a deal?

The conservative response to President Clinton's economic plan seems eerily coherent, seamless, well planned—as if Newt Gingrich, Pat Buchanan, Jack Kemp and William Bennett (not to mention my friend and colleague Fred Barnes) all went to a clandestine meeting at some suburban Ramada Inn and got their stories straight. If you've been watching your CNN, you know the party line: the deficit was declining until the 1990 budget deal, which is the center of evil in the modern world. By raising taxes and foolishly trusting Congress to lower spending, the 1990 deal not only failed to cut the deficit—it actually produced the current crisis. "The economic arguments driving the Clinton budget are empirically, demonstrably false," says Bennett. "[T]he most recent evidence is the 1990 budget agreement."

This is the sort of neat, blame-placing story that political movements are built on. The trouble is that this particular story is mainly wrong. Before memory fades, and today's blustering assertions congeal into an indestructible myth, it's worth examining them one at a time:

1. Did Congress renege on the spending cuts agreed on in the 1990 deal? Bush was snookered, the argument goes. He agreed to new taxes in exchange for a pledge from the Democratic Congress to make spending cuts—a deal not unlike the one Clinton now proposes. But the spending cuts never materialized. Just as Congress reneged then, it will renege now on any promise to slash spending in future years.

What's the truth? The 1990 deal created an elaborate set of spending controls. Caps were placed on "discretionary" spending—that is, money that must be appropriated each year by Congress. A different mechanism was designed in an attempt to control "entitlements"—programs where spending is automatic, depending on the number of beneficiaries who qualify. Under the deal, Congress agreed that any changes it made in entitlements and taxes, taken together, wouldn't add to the deficit. New programs would have to be "pay-as-you-go."

Congress has so far faithfully adhered to all these spending constraints. The caps have been met. (Spending for defense in 1993 actually came in a few billion below the cap.) True, the caps were designed so that they didn't really begin to pinch domestic spending until the 1994 budget—the one now being prepared by the new administration. But there was no reneging. The pay-as-you-go provisions were also followed, with trivial slippage.

2. Did the 1990 deal fail? It obviously failed to *lower* the deficit. In January 1991, shortly after the 1990 deal was signed, the Congressional Budget Office announced that "the deficit is likely to fall significantly between now and 1995 as a result of" the deal. In 1991 the deficit was $270 billion. By 1995 it was supposed to be down to $29 billion. But the 1995 deficit is now expected to be $284 billion.

What happened? First, the recession started in July 1990, just as the budget deal was initially being discussed. With less to tax, revenues fell dramatically. CBO attributes $68 billion of the rise in the 1995 deficit to the sour economy.

Second, without any action by Congress, Medicare and Medicaid spending exploded. Medicaid's cost had been growing about 10 percent a year. In 1990 it grew 19 percent. In 1991 it grew 28 percent; in 1992, 29 percent. Much of this spending was ordered up by judges. A Supreme Court decision required that more children be allowed to claim disability benefits (including Medicaid). Various lawsuits increased the fees paid to hospitals, and expanded the home health services available under Medicare. Meanwhile, governors were learning to dump costs onto Medicaid, most notoriously through a scheme in which payments to doctors and hospitals were raised and then taxed away—with the federal government sharing the payments but the state getting all the taxes. Massachusetts Governor William Weld actually gave an award to the bureaucrat who brought this scam to his state.

3. Did the 1990 tax hikes fail to raise any money? Tax increases in the 1990 deal were supposed to raise $175 billion over five years. But, says Kemp, "the anticipated tax revenues failed to materialize, as they always do when taxes are raised." The idea that taxes can *never* help raise revenues is central to the conservative attack on Clinton's proposal. It is, of course, absurd. If it were true, we could abolish all taxes tomorrow without the government losing a penny.

But something did go wrong with federal revenues since 1990. The CBO blames the economy for a loss of $58 billion in 1992; but there is an *additional* revenue loss of $38 billion that isn't accounted for in CBO's economic model. Aha! say supply-siders. This mysterious "technical" loss surely proves Kemp's thesis—raise taxes and the rich will find ways to pay less of them.

But the biggest chunk of the lost revenue has reflected a drop in the realization of capital gains. The 1990 budget deal did *not* raise taxes on capital gains. It increased the top income tax rate to 31 percent, but it kept the capital gains rate at 28 percent. If anything, according to supply-side theory, this 3 percent advantage should have encouraged more investments that produced capital gains. If capital gains fell, it had more to do with the collapse of real estate than with supply-side economics.

4. Did the 1990 budget deal cause the recession? If the unexpected growth of the deficit was due largely to the recession, and not the budget deal itself, the conservatives are down to their final argument, which is that the deal is what *caused* the recession. This claim is complicated by the fact that the recession clearly started well before the deal was consummated in October 1990. Gingrich, in an August speech denouncing any proposed taxes, noted that the economy was already "going into a recession."

Gingrich et al. could claim, as does Daniel Mitchell, an economist with the Heritage Foundation, that the mere prospect of tax hikes was enough to send the economy into a dive. The problem with this theory is that it doesn't jibe with the Reagan experience. The economy fell into a near-depression in 1982, when the biggest tax cuts in history loomed. It recovered in 1983, after a huge chunk of that tax cut was taken back by Congress.

The 1990 tax hikes might still have made an existing recession worse. But the net tax increase in 1991, the key recession year, was only $18 billion. With spending cuts, the total anti-stimulative hit came to about $30 billion. How much effect can $30 billion have on a $5 trillion economy? Certainly conservatives can't argue that a $30 billion contraction plunged the economy into prolonged recession, while at the same time arguing (as many do) that Clinton's proposed $30 billion stimulus will have no effect!

Yes, if you believe Keynes, raising taxes and cutting spending didn't *help* the economy pull out of its slump. Maybe the conservatives were right that we shouldn't try to begin cutting the deficit during a recession (though the long-term gain could still outweigh the short-term pain). But we aren't in a recession now. If we can't shrink the deficit when there's a recession, and we can't shrink it when there's no recession, when can we?

MICKEY KAUS

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

MARCH 15, 1993

SO NEAR, SO FAR

Much has been made in the last week of how radical a change is implicit in Bill Clinton's economic plan, and there is clearly some truth to this claim. We are rid at last of crazy Republican accounting, of the fictions that for ten years passed for fiscal policy, of the notion that taxation was politically impossible, that Americans were not ready for some kind of sacrifice to set their house in order. The best parts of Clinton's electrifying speech were those in which his own honesty broke out, and particularly those that were directed at Republican deceit. Clinton managed in sixty-five minutes to consummate the political breakthrough of the 1992 campaign (a breakthrough achieved in no small part thanks to Paul Tsongas and, yes, Ross Perot): that we should no longer discuss whether to cut the deficit, but how; that we should no longer talk about whether to redirect government spending from consumption to investment, but about how to do so quickly and in what form.

But given the enormity of this political transformation, it's striking how modest the economic plan actually is. In many of the critical areas we highlighted on this page last week, the plan sputtered into caution and conservatism. In almost every choice in cutting spending, the plan follows the soft option, even in the biggest and most wasteful government subsidies (for a case study, see "Wheat and Chaff" by James Bovard, page 18); in taxation, it creates almost as many new loopholes as it remedies painful inadequacies (see "Thrown for a Loop" by Robert S. McIntyre, page 17). The result is a plan that will make only a modest reduction in the short-term deficit and still leave long-term structural deficits intact; one that will reverse many of the advances made by the 1986 Tax Reform Act and aid the already rich at the expense of the aspiring and prosperous; and one that will beef up old-style liberal programs—block grants to mayors, summer youth jobs, farm subsidies, WIC—at the expense of aggressive new spending in research and development, infrastructure and basic research. (For all the fanfare, Clinton plans to spend on R&D a mere quarter of what he promised in the campaign.) Workfare and national service—two critical and expensive New Democrat initiatives—have been watered down to insignificance.

The political strategy behind this budget is clear. Clinton is intent on avoiding Bush's mistake of 1990, which was to strike a budget deal that alienated his own party and left him stranded. Thus farmers, public sector unions, big city mayors have been paid off. Costly pork, such as the space station and supercollider, dear to congressional Democrats, has hardly been touched. Now, with his own party on board, Clinton can call the Republicans' bluff and force them to come up with their own spending cuts or quit whining about the deficit. Republicans who have not turned into supply-side zombies now have the exquisite task of alienating some of their constituents and standing by their small government rhetoric. We relish the prospect.

But there's a strong possibility that the politics of the plan are far too refined. What if the Republicans do not rise to the occasion and miraculously give Clinton the cuts he hasn't had the guts to make himself? He's left with a $200 billion deficit in 1997, which is destined to rise again shortly thereafter. That's the same deficit as a proportion of GNP as in 1989—and that's assuming the plan works exactly as billed. Clinton will have presided over a massive tax hike, made only marginal shifts in spending priorities and left the deficit only slightly less threatening than when he found it. The voters, we believe, are likely to punish such a record, as surely as they punished Bush's.

Clinton has challenged those who wish him to be tougher to be specific. Well, here's a list of proposals that we think make the package fairer and fiscally safer: halve the stimulus package (it will do little to create real new jobs and is unnecessary anyway); kill the space station; limit the mortgage interest deduction to $12,000 a year; phase in an end—yes, an end—to farm subsidies; repeal the investment tax credit; increase the energy tax by half as much again. Not quite how Washington operates, we understand, but Clinton was not elected to behave the way Washington wants.

Given the choice between Clinton's plan and nothing, of course, we pick Clinton's. We just wish the president had realized the country was ready for a revolution, not an attitude adjustment. •

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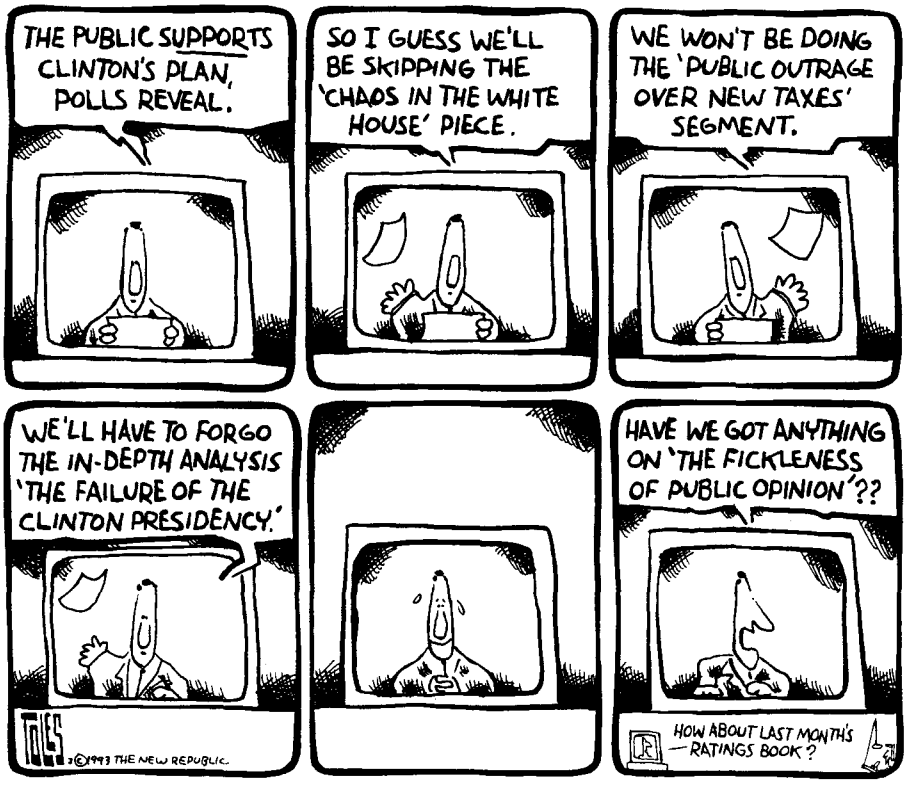
NOTEBOOK

ON CLOSER EXAMINATION: Wonder why there's not more howling about Clinton's plan to cut the federal work force by 4 percent, or 100,000 jobs? It's because it's largely a sham. Consider the National Archives. Testifying before Congress last week, one of the assistant archivists, James Megronigle, was asked about what the cuts would mean for his agency. According to *The Washington Post*, Megronigle said they would have no effect whatsoever. Why? A 4 percent cut means the Archives would go from its authorized level of 2,750 workers to 2,640. But—surprise—the Archives now employs only 2,640 people. Result of Clinton cuts: nada. If Clinton ever threatens to trim real employees, we'll hear about it. The Archives will undoubtedly threaten to close down.


THE PUBLIC SUPPORTS CLINTON'S PLAN, POLLS REVEAL.
SO I GUESS WE'LL BE SKIPPING THE 'CHAOS IN THE WHITE HOUSE' PIECE.
WE WON'T BE DOING THE 'PUBLIC OUTRAGE OVER NEW TAXES' SEGMENT.
WE'LL HAVE TO FORGO THE IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS 'THE FAILURE OF THE CLINTON PRESIDENCY.'
HAVE WE GOT ANYTHING ON 'THE FICKLENESS OF PUBLIC OPINION'??
HOW ABOUT LAST MONTH'S —RATINGS BOOK?
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BALD-FACED LIES DEPARTMENT: "This is a bolt out of the blue. I never expected to be in government, never aspired to be in government. It is a classic example of an offer I could not refuse." —Bill Clinton's Oxford roommate Strobe Talbott, quoted in *Time* on his appointment as ambassador-at-large and adviser to the secretary of state on the former Soviet Union, February 1

ASSAD COMMENTARY: Woody Allen once observed that nine-tenths of life is just showing up. Hafez Assad has turned that saw into a principle of diplomacy, and Warren Christopher has fallen for it. Assad told Christopher, in what *The New York Times* called "an unusually conciliatory gesture to the Clinton administration," that it would not link the return of the deportees from Lebanon to the resumption of the peace process, for which Assad was rewarded by Christopher with a promise of a renewed American activism at the peace table. "We intend, if anything, to be more active than the United States has been in the past," said the secretary of state. At this late date in the history of Middle Eastern diplomacy, Christopher's misreading of Assad is almost comic. Assad is not expressing large-heartedness about peace. He is expressing small-heartedness about the Palestinians. The Americans were relieved to hear the Syrian foreign minister refer to the Palestinians as only "a thorn," but that is the kindest thing that a Syrian official has said about the Palestinians in a long time. The Israelis might take a lesson or two from the Syrians in winning American prizes for anti-Palestinian policies.

QUOTA UNQUOTE: One of our readers recently passed along a rejection letter from Ted Wagner of Carter Ledyard & Milburn, a Wall Street law firm: "Thank you for your recent inquiry about a Summer position. Unfortunately, our firm does not plan to hire first year associates next Summer, except for one from the Association of the Bar of the City of New York's Minority Recruitment Program." In other words, whites need not apply.

FAREWELL: Dorothy Wickenden leaves TNR this week as executive editor, but will remain a contributing editor. She will spend the next several months working on an anthology of THE NEW REPUBLIC, to be published next year by New Republic/Basic Books. This summer she will join *Newsweek* as a senior editor for national affairs. Dorothy came to TNR as production manager in 1978, became managing editor in 1980, and executive editor last year. In 1988-89 she was a Nieman Fellow at Harvard. At TNR, in addition to her editorial work, Dorothy has written about national politics and social issues, and reviewed fiction and nonfiction for the back of the book. Anyone who knows the magazine from more than a cursory glance at its pages—and especially those who have written for it—will know how much we will miss her editorial judgment and her professionalism. Above all, we'll miss her. •

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BI-IDEOLOGICAL

By Fred Barnes

When T.V. anchormen Tom Brokaw, Dan Rather, Peter Jennings and Bernard Shaw came to lunch at the White House on February 17, President Clinton put everyone at ease, including himself. Clinton was exhausted and hadn't finished tinkering with the text of his economic speech to Congress that night. But he ate with abandon. Offered a choice of lamb, beef or chicken as an entrée, he took all three, plus fish chowder, broccoli, salad, bread and two scoops of apple soufflé. "He ate everything but the drapes," says one of the anchormen. This didn't prevent Clinton from pushing his economic program effectively. He talked up his plan without seeming to indulge in spin control. "I really believe I can prevail on this if I go out and engage the American people in an honest dialogue," Clinton said. The anchormen were impressed.

Skillful handling of the gang of four put Clinton one up on Ronald Reagan. Schmoozing politicians and journalists—retail politics—wasn't Reagan's strength. (I once had lunch with Reagan and learned more about Errol Flynn than Reaganomics.) He was great at addressing the nation on T.V.—wholesale politics—and persuading people. Clinton is terrific at both, making him the Greater Communicator. The only question is what he communicates. Clinton can teach it round or teach it flat. What leaders of the moderate Democratic Leadership Council liked about Clinton, who was DLC chairman in 1991, was his ability to make centrist, New Democratic ideas palatable to liberals. In fact, that was the genius of his campaign last year for the Democratic presidential nomination. Now he's shifted. This time he's pushing liberalism to centrists. Whichever way he swings, he's good at it: a truly bi-ideological president.

His economic program is roughly what Walter Mondale would have proposed had he been elected last fall: higher taxes, increased domestic spending, more government direction of the economy, some spending cuts. But it didn't sound that way when Clinton unveiled the program in his sixty-five-minute speech to Congress. He deemphasized taxes, played up deficit reduction. While the program was crafted to win passage in a Congress controlled by liberal Democrats, the speech was aimed at middle-of-the-road Americans, particularly the 19 million who voted for Perot. Contrary to reports, Clinton did not order a fresh draft with a more moderate, New Democratic tilt. Instead, he gave it that slant by ad-libbing nearly half the speech. "I have to say that we all know our government has been just great at building programs," he said, winging it. "The time has come to show the American people that we can limit them, too, that we can not only start things, but we can actually stop things."

If that didn't plagiarize Perot, it at least echoed him, as did other passages. He denounced the "undue influence of special interests" and lobbyists. He touted cuts in the federal bureaucracy. "It's not enough simply to cut government," he said. "We have to rethink the whole way it works." He used scare tactics to dramatize the deficit. "If we stay with the same trends of the last four years, by the end of the decade the deficit will be $635 billion a year, almost 80 percent of our gross national product, and paying interest on the debt will be the costliest government program of all." Of course, even George Bush didn't favor those "same trends."

On the road, he's even more ingenious in characterizing his proposals. At a town meeting in Chillicothe, Ohio, on February 19, he was asked about his national service program. It offers student loans for college, with the money paid back over time or through community service. Because the plan is so expensive, Clinton has been forced to scale it back. But that's not the way he described it to a high school senior who inquired. There's "more government spending, all right, but see, that's a direct investment in youth," he said. "That's not expanding some government program. That's putting the money directly into you. That's cutting the cost of the program and increasing investment in your future." Really? It may be true that national service doesn't expand an existing program. That's because it's a costly new program.

In Chillicothe, Clinton described his "national economic strategy" this way: "Number one, we cut spending, 150 different spending cuts, putting the lid on federal pay increases, cutting the White House staff by 25 percent, cutting the administrative costs to the federal government by 14 percent over fourteen years, saving billions and billions of dollars." No mention that his program calls for new spending exceeding these cuts. "Number two," he continued, "we raise funds in taxes in a way that I think is fair.... Third, we increase dramatically... the refundable earned income tax credit so that no one with an income of $30,000 or less would pay any new money under this plan." Almost as a postscript, he said, "We did actually increase some funds." This wasn't government spending in Clinton's vernacular, but "new investments in the areas that create jobs."

On February 21 in Mountain View, California, Clinton soft-pedaled his policy of government intervention in the economy to promote new technology. He never mentioned the phrase "industrial policy," though it would have been appropriate. (He uttered it the day before in Santa Monica, California, suggesting it was often wrongly used to stigmatize any government effort to create high-wage jobs.) He characterized "the national government's role" as "creating a partnership with the private sector to generate more of these kinds of [high-tech] companies, more technological advances to keep the United States always on the cutting edge of change and to try to make sure we'll be able to create a lot of good new jobs for the

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future." In short, industrial policy.

Clinton joked in Mountain View about the chaotic manner in which his speech to Congress was drafted. "But it worked," he insisted. "You know, it worked." Too true. It produced Reagan-like results, and not only in high overnight poll ratings. Journalists and politicians in Washington quibbled over the details of the program. Outside, people responded favorably to the overall thrust of the plan as described by Clinton. In Washington, Republicans said the numbers didn't add up, that so-called spending cuts were really tax increases, that there was funny business in the calculation of tax hikes hitting only those making over $100,000. Republicans were mostly right, but nobody cared, just as few had when Democrats poked holes in Reagan's speeches. Clinton also turned out to have another Reagan quality. When he put himself front and center, speaking in public, his presidency grew in popularity and political strength.

The Clinton magic worked in private too—unlike Reagan's. Hillary Clinton invited the nation's foremost economic conservative, Chairman Alan Greenspan of the Federal Reserve, to sit with her in the gallery as the president addressed Congress. Fed officials urged Greenspan to reject the invitation and sit with the Supreme Court justices. He joined Hillary anyway, and two days later spoke favorably of the Clinton program. Better yet, Ross Perot, the man whose attacks were most feared at the White House, was neutralized. Clinton called Perot on February 17, hours before the speech to Congress. Perot was just leaving Dallas for Washington, where he was to appear on "Nightline" to discuss the speech. They talked for twenty minutes. On "Nightline," Perot said Clinton's program was a good first step. At rallies in Florida a few days later, Perot touted ho-hum process reforms—killing the electoral college, line-item veto, etc.—instead of zinging Clinton. His silence reflected the power of Clinton's persuasion. •

Clinton's emerging Balkan strategy.

NOT BUSH

By Patrick Glynn

President Clinton's decision to air drop relief to besieged Muslims in eastern Bosnia sets the United States on a new course in the Balkans. But it's still not clear if the administration will be able to navigate the complex military and diplomatic realities toward a successful solution to the conflict. One crucial question concerns the status of the air drops themselves. Will they be offered as just another band-aid in an interminable conflict, or will they be used as the opening wedge for a gradually more assertive American role that seeks to redefine the basic terms of the struggle? The administration itself seems unsure. The question is critical not only for containing the Balkan war, but for defining the nature of the post-cold war order and the American role within it.

From the start Clinton has appeared torn between campaign promises and private sentiment on the one hand and the seeming imperatives of prudent diplomacy and domestic politics on the other. Initially the administration took the ostensibly prudent route, turning its back on campaign promises and endorsing at least in principle the flawed Vance-Owen negotiations on Bosnia.

It was the Bosnians themselves who forced a change of course. In a dramatic ten-day hunger strike, the residents of Sarajevo refused to accept relief supplies in protest against the U.N.'s long-standing failure to get food to besieged Muslim towns in eastern Bosnia. In response, U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees Sadaka Ogata cut off deliveries to Sarajevo entirely (her purpose was reportedly to draw further attention to the Bosnians' plight). Concerned and politically embarrassed, the administration floated the idea of air drops. Objections from U.N. officials in New York and Sarajevo (where hostage U.N. forces, oddly solicitous of their Serb harassers, increasingly betray symptoms of Stockholm syndrome) led the president to soften his policy (no fighter cover will be provided for U.S. transport aircraft) without abandoning it.

U.N. and allied objections portrayed the gesture as potentially provocative to the Serbs. Predictably, however, Serbs quickly became more accommodating—allowing passage within days to two eastward-bound U.N. convoys (only ten such relief convoys had reached eastern Bosnia in the previous ten months). The Serb response suggested the basic logic of the struggle: only the credible threat—and eventually the careful application—of American power is capable of containing or reversing Belgrade's aggression.

Clinton's gesture, modest though it is, marks a new level of involvement for the United States and a sharp break with the policies of his predecessor, whose overriding objective was to avoid a Balkan involvement at any price. Even when the Bush administration ostensibly declared itself in favor of strong action—as in its call for an enforced no-fly zone or its tentative proposal to lift the arms embargo against the Bosnians—it did so merely to appease domestic critics, and with the full expectation that such measures would be adamantly opposed by Britain and France. Indeed, reports from former officials involved in policy-making indicate that the administration cynically hid behind the allies' objections, avoiding involvement while seeking to shift blame for the debacle to the Europeans. The sole exception was the issue of Kosovo, where Bush's departing letter to Milosevic, warning against further military action in that province, was meant to be taken seriously.

Although there are signs that Bush's warning (recently echoed by Secretary of State Warren Christo-

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pher) helped deter immediate expansion of the war into Kosovo, the situation Bush left behind was bad and growing worse. In Bosnia conditions remained horrifying. Refugees continued to stream into Germany and other European states. European publics remained disturbed by American inaction, and moderate Islamic governments were uneasy at the West's failure to aid a Muslim population subject to genocide. At the same time, there was new potential for a rift with Russia, where the growing triumphs of Serb militants have become a rallying cry for extreme nationalist opponents of the centrist Yeltsin government.

Clinton's policy lacks the cynicism of Bush's, but it also lacks the strategic self-confidence. His criticisms of Bush's Balkans policy clearly benefited his campaign. But the situation he found upon entering office, as his advisers have been at pains to stress, was marked by serious constraints. In a last-minute effort to save their peace talks and gain control of the agenda, peace conference mediators Cyrus Vance and David Owen attempted to impose a solution that would partition the country and unseat the Bosnian government. They called for U.N. sanctions to enforce the settlement—on, of all groups, the beleaguered Bosnians. Vance and Owen were publicly critical and privately contemptuous of the new administration. (Owen opined in one private meeting that he was not about to conduct an "academic seminar" on the Balkans for the Clinton team.) They thought they could force the issue, managing to secure support not only from U.N. Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali (no friend of the Bosnians), but also from Britain and France, whose troops were committed to the peace-keeping effort, and the E.C. But Vance and Owen aside, it was clear that any sudden U.S. intervention could threaten Yeltsin, whose Parliament in December called on Russia to oppose Western intervention. (Whether it would strengthen Russian democracy to appease Yeltsin's opponents by allowing Serbs to run amok was another question.)

The Clinton administration remains split. A number of senior officials—Vice President Al Gore, his national security adviser Leon Fuerth, NSC staffer Jenonne Walker and U.N. ambassador Madeleine Albright—have favored stronger action. Others—including Christopher—have been less enthusiastic, and domestic advisers have counseled against action that could distract from Clinton's domestic economic agenda.

The result has been a contradictory policy, defining Bosnia, in Christopher's words, as a "crucial test" requiring "the full weight of American diplomacy," while offering almost nothing in the way of concrete action. Special envoy Reginald Bartholomew's briefings to members of Congress have been notably vague, and Bartholomew and other senior officials speaking on background have sought to dampen expectations and hinted at a merely cosmetic solution. The worst-case scenario, Bartholomew told members of Congress, would be an indefinite continuation of talks; the best case would be a settlement that conveyed the image of preserving Bosnia.

Now Clinton has cast diplomatic niceties aside and done the right thing. The question is whether he will follow through. Ultimately, containing the Serbs will require military action or at least the credible threat of such action. Undeterred, the Serbs, who understand only force, are likely to expand the conflict into Macedonia and Kosovo. Moreover, Belgrade's potential for causing mischief elsewhere was suggested by press reports—privately confirmed by U.S. officials—of a Greek vessel laden with Serbian arms bound for Africa, for eventual sale to Somali warlords. Clinton is finding that at the end of the cold war, the struggle between the democracies and the dictators is far from done. Now, as earlier in the century, the democracies can only protect themselves by standing up for principle and backing their stand with force.

PATRICK GLYNN is a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute.

A report from Iraq.

BOMB SHELTER

By David Kay

With the start of the Clinton administration, Iraq claims to have adopted a new policy of cooperation with U.N. weapons inspectors. This apparently reverses the Baghdad announcements of December 11, 1992, that Iraq would "drink the blood" of U.N. inspectors and that "the people of Iraq hate the inspection teams more than they hate the U.S. Air Force." Lieutenant General Rashid Amer, identified as the head of the Iraqi Military Industries Ministry, is quoted as having told the inspectors in December that they will "get nothing more, nothing. It is finished. You can bomb us or occupy us. It doesn't matter." The feints and thrusts of Iraqi statements bring sharply to mind my own experience over nine months of trying to root out Iraq's clandestine nuclear weapons program.

The inspection effort in Iraq had begun under inauspicious circumstances. Before the Gulf war, the International Atomic Energy Agency had not found Iraq to have violated any of its safeguard obligations; and there were real doubts in several capitals about whether the IAEA could mount a zealous inspection. On April 18, 1991, the Iraqis gave the U.N. details about the locations and quantities of its chemical, biological, ballistic missile and nuclear material stocks, and they denied that they had any nuclear materials that fell under U.N. Security Council Resolution 687, which effected the cease-fire in the Gulf war. This response made it clear that Iraq was determined to be

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uncooperative and to attempt to deceive the U.N.

We were an improbable group in an even more improbable situation. Desert Shield and Desert Storm had been carefully built up over seven months and represented the highest level of Western military technology. The U.N. inspection effort, by contrast, had been quickly pulled together almost as an afterthought to the war. For more than a month we could not find an Arab state that would serve as a forward base for our inspection missions. The only air transport that was available to fly the inspection teams into Iraq was an aged BAC-111 that had been leased from the Romanian state airline. We weren't reassured by the widespread rumor that the plane had been leased to the U.N. because it was no longer considered airworthy for commercial use in Europe. Our ground transport for the first three months consisted of six British Land Rovers (with broken fuel gauges) left over from Desert Storm. Our local communications equipment used frequencies easily monitored by the Iraqis and CNN.

The inspection teams also seemed almost comically unprepared. They were no more than thirty to forty-five members each, and consisted mostly of a motley array of paunchy, middle-aged scientists. This was what the international community marshaled to find and destroy an Iraqi nuclear program that had largely been missed before the war by national intelligence efforts, had gone completely undetected by the safeguard inspection of the IAEA and, as it would turn out, had been missed to a considerable extent by military strikes in the war. It certainly represented the triumph of hope over reason.

The most gratifying thing even now, a year and a half after the first inspection, is that we were able to uncover so much of the Iraq program in our first six months. The press and various national leaders referred to it as a game of "hide and seek" or "cheat and retreat," but none of us viewed it as a game. The military might and secret police that surrounded most of our moves in Iraq indicated to me that Saddam remains very dangerous. We were keenly aware of the Iraqi guns, the consequence of a mistake and our sense of the significance of what we were trying to accomplish.

The success of the early inspections can actually be attributed to the haste with which they were organized. Unlike the norm for the IAEA and the U.N., in the first six months chief inspectors were given the authority and freedom to conduct real inspections, not merely the formal diplomatic dances that were performed by the IAEA safeguard inspections. On my first inspection mission, June 22 to July 3, I concluded that the IAEA's insistence on giving the Iraqis overnight notice of upcoming inspections only allowed them to move equipment and documents before the inspectors arrived. I decided to conduct the first zero-notice arms inspection the next morning. We arrived unannounced at an Iraqi military base at al-Falluja (after having tricked our military escorts into believing we were going to a different site), photographed a truck convoy of more than eighty vehicles trying to escape from the back entrance of the base and had shots fired over our heads by Iraqi troops.

There was a stunning payoff to this change of tactics. A previously unknown uranium enrichment program was identified, and undeniable proof of the scale of the Iraqi clandestine weapons program began to emerge and to shock the world. Before the end of October 1991 we had amassed overwhelming evidence of a $7 billion to $10 billion secret nuclear program that had put the Iraqis within eighteen months of their first nuclear weapon. In these early months, we were able to locate and eliminate the Iraqi nuclear program and make sure that the world knew how close to disaster failed policies and institutions had brought us.

In Iraq I had many opportunities to meet Iraqi officials and try to understand why they had embarked on a program that could have led to the annihilation of their state. They never acknowledged the dangers they could have faced if their nuclear aims had been discovered earlier, but their security and deception efforts revealed they were aware of the riskiness of their venture. The nuclear weapons program had been wrapped in a variety of innocuous cover names, such as PC-3, Petrochemical Project 3, and numerous expensive steps had been taken to disguise the real purpose of the many facilities built to support it. The extent to which Iraq had been able to adopt measures that deceived the best Western intelligence methods should give pause to Western policy-makers who believe that technical intelligence alone can provide safety.

Equally chilling were our discoveries that the Iraqis had not abandoned their aims. One evening over dinner, Dr. Jaffar dia Jaffar, the British-educated scientific leader of Iraq's effort to produce a bomb, described in detail the lessons that Iraq had learned about the effectiveness of coalition airpower. He told us that new guidelines had just been issued by the Ministry of Military Industrialization for the construction of new buildings, so that "next time" they would better survive cruise missile and cluster bomb attacks.

It is too early to tell precisely what the U.N. inspections in Iraq accomplished. The long-term monitoring and verification efforts needed to ensure that the Iraqi program is not revived have barely begun. If Saddam remains in power, it is doubtful that the international community will be able to maintain enough pressure on Iraq to allow a long-term inspection effort to work. On at least seven occasions since the end of the Gulf war the inspection process has stopped in the face of Iraqi intransigence. Only the threat of resumed military actions overcame these impediments.

Those leaders who, in August 1990, recognized the nature of the challenge presented by Saddam's invasion of Kuwait and mobilized an international coalition to stand firm and repel this aggression deserve appreciation and respect. But the nature of weapons of mass destruction means that a second chance to correct a failed policy is not guaranteed. Iraq has shown us that nuclear proliferation is possible by more routes, by

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more states and with less warning than previously had been thought possible. If Saddam had not invaded Kuwait in June 1990, but instead had waited until June 1992, the world would have been facing a nuclear armed Iraq. Iraq, rather than being the exception, is more likely to have been the lucky accident.

DAVID KAY is a former chief U.N. nuclear weapons inspector in Iraq.

SCIENCE AND SOCIETY

GROWTH INDUSTRY

By Robert Bazell

Two friends of mine, women in their mid-40s, died recently of breast cancer. In a desperate attempt to survive, each consumed about a half million dollars' worth of medical care, including experimental bone marrow transplants and high doses of chemotherapy. Doctors told each woman the treatments represented her only hope, but the treatments did little if anything to prolong either life. Such cases will quickly take center stage when the debate over health care reform in America becomes serious. Discussions of bureaucratic concepts such as managed competition and global budgets will matter little compared with the stark question of who gets what care and who does not. Cancer treatment offers some of the best examples of the obstacles facing any attempts to change American health care.

Questionable treatments clutter the entire landscape of American medicine. But in cancer therapy, the irrationality that drives much of our medical care reaches profound heights. There is no denying that cancer detection and treatment, especially surgery and radiation, save or prolong thousands of lives every year. But when it comes to patients who cannot be helped by surgery or radiation, many oncologists admit they are working in an era that will be recalled as the dark ages of their specialty, akin to the time when physicians applied leeches. Often they administer treatments when there is no objective reason to believe they will help the patient. This happens for many reasons, but most often because patients and their families demand hope and doctors believe it their duty to provide it, no matter how unrealistic and no matter what the cost.

Almost 200 diseases, characterized by uncontrolled cell growth, are clustered under the heading of cancer. But the image of cancer as a single entity has long occupied a special place in the American psyche, conjuring up images of a disease that is not only deadly but that kills in an especially agonizing and humiliating way. Thus we have an American Cancer Society, a National Cancer Institute and an official "war on cancer."

Most Americans probably assume that cancer treatment is better today than it was a few decades ago. It certainly is more expensive. Thirty years ago a patient with metastatic pancreatic cancer, for example, would have received little more than pain killers and been allowed to die peacefully. Today that patient will likely undergo several rounds of chemotherapy at a cost of thousands of dollars, even though few doctors would maintain that it will succeed in prolonging life or alleviating suffering. Indeed, nowadays many patients with all sorts of cancer that cannot be treated with surgery or radiation undergo chemotherapy. Dr. Irwin Krakoff of M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, one of the founders of the field of oncology and one of its most respected practitioners, told me: "There is little we can do" for most cancers that have returned after surgery. "Typically we are giving the patients a few extra months. It is seldom years."

Statistics compiled by the government also belie the assumption that cancer survival rates are improving. The overall death rate for cancer, adjusted to account for the aging population, is actually rising. In 1975, 162.2 out of every 100,000 Americans died of cancer. By 1989, the last year for which figures are available, the rate had risen to 173.1. Some cancer specialists argue that the epidemic of lung cancer caused by smoking should be taken out of the equation. If it is, the death rate remains about the same as it was before.

The lack of progress also can be affirmed by a casual look at medical literature. A review of head and neck cancer treatments in a recent issue of *The New England Journal of Medicine* is typical. It lists standard therapies as well as many new experimental treatments and concludes that clinical investigations "have led to new insights. However, improved survival has not yet been achieved." When Food and Drug Administration commissioner David Kessler recently announced the approval of Taxol as a treatment for ovarian cancer, he emphasized that the drug works in only 30 percent of the cases, and then for a maximum of seven months. Krakoff, who has supervised several trials of Taxol, calls Kessler's assessment "quite optimistic."

For centuries doctors have recognized that the best treatment for cancer is to find it early and cut it out; if it spreads internally, the outlook is grim. Surgery emerged as a genuine treatment only at the end of the last century with the discovery of anesthesia and the adoption of sterile procedures. Radiation therapy provided further benefits in the early part of this century. In the 1930s and '40s a series of advances, including safe blood transfusions, improved surgery, so that by the 1950s, according to American Cancer Society statistics, almost half the patients diagnosed with cancer survived five years. Up to that point cancer treatment had advanced at about the same pace as the rest of medicine. But then antibiotics, the polio vaccine, better heart treatments

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and other seeming miracles transformed most doctors, in the eyes of the public, into technological wizards who could conquer any malady.

But doctors treating cancer patients were left behind. Although they could cure some people, for many others all they could offer was comfort and compassion. To try to find their own magic, cancer specialists turned to chemotherapy. During the Second World War Cornelius "Dusty" Rhoads, the head of Memorial Hospital in New York, then the country's pre-eminent cancer facility, took a leave to run the military's chemical warfare service. At the Edgewood Arsenal in Maryland he supervised the long secret and now infamous tests where thousands of American troops were intentionally exposed to mustard and other poisonous gases. Rhoads discovered that the mustard gas killed white blood cells and other cells that divide rapidly. After the war he and others began to experiment with mustard gas as a cancer treatment and also to search for other systemic poisons that kill dividing cells. In 1953 Rhoads told a *New York Times* reporter: "Inevitably, as I see it, we can look forward to something like a penicillin for cancer, and I hope, within the next decade."

Eventually doctors using chemotherapy achieved substantial cure rates for many childhood cancers, Hodgkin's disease, testicular cancer and a few other types. But these improvements, while impressive and heartening, affected only a tiny percentage of cancer cases. In most instances, if surgery and radiation did not eliminate the malignancy, the outlook remained bleak. This lack of progress prompted a group of philanthropists, and politically savvy doctors, to lobby Congress for more money for cancer research. In 1971 Dr. R. Lee Clark, the head of M.D. Anderson Hospital and one of the country's best-known cancer doctors, proclaimed that "with a billion dollars a year for ten years we could lick cancer." That same year Clark and his friends won that promise of a billion a year as part of the official war on cancer. The money has, among other things, financed basic research into the biology of cancer that eventually could lead to better treatments. Indeed, clinical trials will soon begin with genetically engineered cells and cell products that could prove to be effective therapies, perhaps even the much sought magic bullet. But anyone who recalls the wildly exaggerated claims of researchers and the resultant headlines from such alleged cancer cures as interferon and interleukin-2 will adopt a wait and see attitude.

Despite the gloomy statistics, almost every oncologist can recall a few cases where patients in seemingly hopeless situations responded to chemotherapy and lived for months or even years. This raises the question: Is a 1 percent chance of survival worth $10,000 or $100,000 worth of treatment? "Those are the sorts of questions we will have to confront if we want simultaneously to put health costs under control and ensure access to proper care," says Dr. Michael Friedman, who heads the National Cancer Institute's Cancer Therapy Evaluation Program.

Some oncologists respond to the paucity of effective treatments by embracing fads—the latest being autologous bone marrow transplants (see "Breast Cancer Scam," TNR, December 31, 1990). Both of my friends who died of breast cancer opted for bone marrow transplants after a hard sell from their oncologists, even though there is no objective evidence that the transplants are effective. Neither woman had the money to pay for the procedure (which typically costs more than $100,000), and neither one's insurance company wanted to pay for an expensive operation, deemed experimental at best. (Both cases are now in court.) But they both got it, because a middle-class patient can receive almost unlimited care if she and her doctor believe it represents her best shot.

At no time did I tell either friend that the transplants were unlikely to work, that they would be better off without undergoing the expense and suffering of the transplants. I know that is not what they wanted to hear, and I would not have had the courage to say it. Yet if there is ever to be effective health reform, we as a society will have to grasp the limits of medical technology. Every promising treatment should be tested thoroughly in controlled trials. And until science demonstrates a treatment is effective, someone will have to have the power and the will to refuse it, no matter how desperately they hope it will help.

ROBERT BAZELL is science correspondent for NBC News.

Empower America fizzles.

DISEMPOWERED

By Ruth Shalit

Vin Weber has a band-aid on his finger. "I missed my wrists," he says. The former Republican congressman from Minnesota is reflecting on his new job as flack for Empower America, an interim nest for rivalrous GOP presidential aspirants. "My role is to explain the organization in a coherent fashion to the country, and to make sure that the interests of all the principals are fully accommodated," he says. "It's a balancing act."

Formed after the election as an antidote to the policies of the Bush administration, Empower America was supposed to find a remedy for what William Bennett calls George Bush's fatal flaw: "the lack of a clear, coherent, compelling message." But the group began to fracture almost immediately after it was unveiled at a January 12 news conference. Co-directors Bennett and Jack Kemp are at political and intellectual odds. They have conflicting notions about how to address poverty and

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An open letter on the Second Amendment.

An Individual Right To Arms?

The view that the Second Amendment[1] to the Constitution of the United States guarantees only the states' right to maintain formal militias has attained a surprising respectability. That may be more explicable as an expression of the hostility many academicians feel towards guns and their owners than as an unbiased constitutional interpretation. The Second Amendment does not guarantee merely a "right of the states," but rather a "right of the people," a term which, as used throughout the Bill of Rights (e.g., the First and Fourth Amendments), is widely understood to encompass a personal right of citizens.

Moreover, the Amendment refers to the "militia," a term which in the 18th century meant not a formal military unit like the National Guard, but a system under which every household and every man of military age was required to own a gun in order to defend the community against tyranny, foreign invasion, and crime. The leading interpretations before Congress when it enacted the Bill of Rights affirmed that by the Second Amendment "the people are confirmed in their right to keep and bear their private arms" — "their own arms."[2]

Furthermore, the "individual right" component of Second-Amendment thought became even more prominent in constitutional theory due to the transformation wrought by and through the debates in the Reconstruction Congress concerning the privileges and immunities of national citizenship. Many Congressmen pointed out that blacks in the South needed to be constitutionally protected in the citizen's individual, personal right to bear arms in self-defense.[3]

Of course, the right to bear arms is no more "absolute" than is the right to speak, to publish, or to assemble. Hence, there is room for disagreement over the scope of Second-Amendment rights, just as there currently exists legitimate disagreement over the scope of the First-Amendment rights of assembly and free speech.[4] Nothing in this statement, therefore, is intended to deny either the constitutionality of, or the need for, sensible gun laws.

1. "A well regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed." 1 Stat. 21 (1848)

2. Kates, "Handgun Prohibition and the Original Meaning of the Second Amendment," 82 *Mich. L. Rev.* 204, 214, 223-224 (1983). *See generally* Amar, "The Bill of Rights as a Constitution," 100 *Yale L.J.* 1131, 1162 ff. (1991); Levinson, "The Embarrassing Second Amendment," 99 *Yale L.J.* 637 (1989); L. Levy, *Original Intent and the Framers' Constitution* 341 (1988); S. Halbrook, *A Right to Bear Arms: State and Federal Bills of Rights and Constitutional Guarantees* (1989).

3. Cottrol and Diamond, "The Second Amendment: Toward an Afro-Americanist Reconsideration," 80 *Georgetown L.J.* 309 (1991).

4. *See, e.g.*, Kates, "The Second Amendment: A Dialogue," 49 *Law & Contemp. Probs.* 145 (1986).

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other social dilemmas. And each is trying to wrest control of the group and use it as the staging ground for his own presidential campaign.

That wasn't quite what Weber and Dan Quayle's chief of staff, Bill Kristol, had in mind when they began plotting the group more than a year and a half ago. Their idea was to create a Republican version of the Democratic Leadership Council, the politically moderate group that Bill Clinton used as a springboard to the presidency. Weber and Kristol figured the Republicans would have a better chance of recapturing the White House in '96 if they could gather prominent party leaders under one roof. The idea attracted the interest of several high-profile politicians, including Bennett, Kemp, William Weld and Jeane Kirkpatrick, as well as wonks Jim Pinkerton, Michael Novak and Martin Anderson.

But instead of a policy tank to promote a unified Republican agenda, Empower America evolved into a Kemp organ. "The concept went through two or three incarnations," says Weber. As the election neared, Weber concluded that the group would be "significant" only if it was built around Kemp. He was the strongest Republican hopeful. Last fall, while Bush flailed, Kemp was "the only one in the administration getting good reviews."

DRAWING BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Weber, a Kempite, was happy to see Empower America rally around his idol, as was investment banker and longtime Kemp booster Theodore Forstmann, who agreed to bankroll the group. According to group members, Forstmann has committed $3 million to $5 million. Bennett agreed that, at least initially, Kemp should be the focus of the group's efforts. But Bennett's decision wasn't motivated by party loyalty alone. "Bill signed on because he thinks he can inherit the mantle if he's in the same organization," says a Bennett associate. "He thinks that if Kemp fails or fades, he'll inherit his legacy." Bennett isn't shy about his own presidential ambitions. "Of course I'm thinking about it," he says. "I think about the other names that are mentioned, and I think: Hey, I can compete in this league."

But other Republicans who had supported the original think tank idea weren't enthusiastic about the change. "To me, it smelled like direct mail," confided one prominent Republican who dropped out. "Empower Your Way to the Top! How to Win Friends and Empower America! No thanks." Kristol politely recused himself. After four years as Quayle's top aide, a jump to Kemp would have been unseemly. "I wish them well," he says. "But I'm not ready to make the commitment required to build other organizations. If it were Quayle, I would say the same thing." Pinkerton also quit. "It just didn't work out," he says. "I wanted to work on my book." A month after the group's founding, Weld had still not been told that Pinkerton, his libertarian soulmate, had left. "Weber promised me he was going to be involved," said Weld, flustered. "I did think it was odd that I didn't see him at the press conference."

The DLC worked because it was undergirded by a cadre of party theorists who provided the raw intellectual material for politicians like Clinton. With the defections of Kristol and Pinkerton, Empower America is all politicians, bound together only by the willing suspension of political disbelief. Bennett and Kemp in particular, the two most strong-headed men in the Republican Party, openly differ in philosophy and policy. Take the central issue of poverty and urban development. Bennett has a bleak view of inner-city dwellers; he blames problems of the urban poor on a violent "culture of poverty" and recommends vigorous "moral reform" before government initiatives. Kemp, in contrast, blames defective incentives, not frayed morals, for the problems of the urban poor. "You cannot give up on those youths who live in the barrio or in the ghettos of America," he says. "There is tremendous talent there. There's a lot of entrepreneurship." As HUD secretary, Kemp preached relentlessly about enterprise zones and tax incentives as a way for the government to help people lift themselves out of poverty.

Far from masking their differences in public, Ben-

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nett and Kemp have gone out of their way to draw attention to them. In a December 14 interview in *The Washington Times*, Bennett took a swipe at Kemp. "Enterprise zones are fine," he mused, "provided you understand you have to have law and order in that neighborhood, or people won't come in. You have to have the work ethic in people's hearts." At Empower America's January 12 press conference, Kemp lashed back. Bennett said he wanted the group to issue an "Index of Leading Cultural Indicators," a sort of flow chart of family values. Kemp retorted: "If Bennett is going to put out a cultural index, maybe I'll put out an Index of Inner City Economic Opportunity, to show what happens when poor people get access to credit and capital."

Weber acknowledges his house is divided: "I'll concede that there is tension among the principals. I'm painfully aware that when you put people of this level and stature together, it does create organizational problems." Still, he says, "At the end of the day, there are no substantive differences between them. Just a huge difference in style."

Yet on other social issues, such as abortion and gay rights, the group as a whole is divided by more than mere differences of style. "These issues are among the most contentious and divisive in American politics," Weber said. "I have specifically argued that we not take a position." Nice try, but David Keene of the American Conservative Union, which favors strong anti-gay and anti-abortion stands, predicts that "they won't get away with it." Even Weber admits that the group can't finesse these issues forever. "I suspect down the road we'll have something to say on abortion, gay adoption, gays in the military," he says. Weber, who calls himself a radical right-to-lifer, has a good idea what that might be. But so does Weld, who thinks he can convince Kemp to be more libertarian. "I think the seeds of that are there in Jack Kemp," Weld says. "He saw that all the bashing in Houston didn't change anybody's mind. The way he looks at the relationship between government and its citizens ... I think there is a real chance to influence his opinion, around the edges at least."

Empower America is so eager to please everyone that it may have a hard time mobilizing anyone. Ego maintenance has already sapped the strength of Weber's diplomatic persuasion, leaving him little time to arbitrate the broader disputes over policy. Weber recalls the statement read at the group's press conference—"as edited by Bennett, as edited by Kirkpatrick, as edited by Kemp.... All three of them made suggestions. All three of them wanted to know why I didn't incorporate all of their suggestions." The two-page statement took days to compose.

Bennett says he wants the organization's first event to be a foray into the curriculum battle in Queens, New York, "on the side of traditional values." Asked if he would support that, Weld said: "Uh, no, certainly not." Several members have spoken out publicly against gays in the military. Would Kemp do the same? Weber laughs. "I don't know that he'd disagree. But if someone asked him to say it himself, he'd say, let's talk about taxes and the economy." Before long, this kind of denial could take its toll. Bennett "has told a lot of people that he's doubtful the group will last more than three to six months," says a Republican close to the group, "both because of the difficulty of personally dealing with Jack, and because Bill wants to press some of the cultural issues; and Jack's nervous about that." He's not the only one. •

Clinton's giveaway to the rich.

THROWN FOR A LOOP

By Robert S. McIntyre

President Clinton deserves credit not only for his terrific speech outlining his economic plan, but also for the plan itself. It's a serious deficit-reduction effort that concentrates its tax hikes on the best-off people and imposes only relatively small burdens on the middle class. But there are some elements of the tax plan that should make those of us dedicated to fair, efficient taxation very, very nervous.

To be sure, the overall distribution of the tax plan is progressive. About two-thirds of the tax increases would hit the wealthiest 9 percent of all families, and the energy tax hikes on the poorest families would be offset by increases in the earned-income tax credit, food stamps and low-income energy assistance. The typical middle-income family would face a tax increase, but only half a percent of income.

The major worry is the way in which the package has thrown overboard many of the fundamental principles of the 1986 Tax Reform Act. A few days before his speech, the president said he would crack down on "those who see the tax code as a table game to be won." In the speech, he added that "for the wealthiest ... we recommend closing some loopholes that allow some people to get away without paying any tax at all." But the program actually includes several changes that undercut these noble goals.

The biggest loophole in the tax package is implicit. Clinton proposes to raise the top personal income tax rate (including the 10 percent surtax on taxable income over $250,000) to almost 40 percent but to keep the top capital gains tax rate at 28 percent. In effect, this offers high-income people the equivalent of a 30 percent capital gains exclusion—exactly what George Bush futilely called for every year he was in office.

Since capital gains are a big chunk of the income of high-income people, leaving the capital gains rate at 28

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Wheat and Chaff

When President Clinton announced a sweeping agenda to reduce the deficit by almost $500 billion, the slashing of farm subsidies—one of the most blatant ways the government wastes money—was touted as an integral part of the effort. But once again the farm lobby has prevailed. For all of Clinton's tough talk, existing farm program subsidies will almost *double* this year, from $9 billion to $17 billion, primarily in response to falling market prices for crops. Other farm programs—such as the Farmers Home Administration, which provides cheap loans to uncreditworthy farmers—will cost taxpayers another $10 billion to $15 billion. Clinton's paltry cuts do not begin to make serious inroads in what is universally regarded as an entitlements swamp.

At the top of the administration's list of agricultural spending cuts is a proposal to end direct farm subsidies to individuals who earn more than $100,000 per year off the farm. Sounds dandy, and it may have some slight impact on absentee farm owners and hobby farmers. But the new subsidy cap will be largely a mirage. Under current law, farmers are eligible to receive up to $50,000 in direct subsidies from the government, regardless of how profitable their farms are or how much money they make off the farm. And because of a series of complex loopholes, many farmers are able to rake in thousands more in additional subsidies above the limit. The same practices are likely to foil the current changes, as they have done to similar changes in farm payments since the early 1970s. The General Accounting Office perennially reports a flock of abuses of the payment limitations law, yet Congress has refused to rewrite the law to achieve its purported goal. Unfortunately, Clinton hasn't shown any inclination to do so either. As a result, his proposed major change is likely to save taxpayers at most $75 million in 1994—less than one half of 1 percent of federal farm subsidies.

In a New York speech two days after the economic address, Clinton declared he would also cut back on subsidies to wool and mohair growers, who are currently entitled to a maximum of $150,000 a year in federal handouts, at a cost of $183 million this year. "We had sheep on the farm when I was a boy, so I'm more sensitive to this than some are. But when I got to studying this, we started a subsidy to sheep growers in World War I because we needed plenty of wool for uniforms. . . . So I recommended cutting it back." And what is Clinton's radical wool proposal? To trim the maximum handout for wool and mohair growers to $50,000. Again, it sounds like a major cut, but in reality, the vast majority of wool and mohair farmers *already* receive less than $50,000; so in 1994 the actual net saving to the taxpayer will be a mere $12 million out of $191 million. The GAO has repeatedly recommended that the wool program be abolished, but New Democrat Clinton cannot bring himself to do that much. By his own estimation, he will save only $682 million (out of more than $40 billion) from payment limitations to farmers over the next four years.

Elsewhere, Clinton plays smoke-and-mirrors with the numbers. For example, he is claiming as a $208 million cut a proposal not to *increase* the current budget for the Market Promotion Program, a slush fund that pays for foreign advertising for favored private companies. This year MPP will lavish $3.47 million on whiskey producers, $260,000 on the Vodka Producers Association, $11.6 million on the Wine Institute and $1.1 million on the Mink Export Development Council. Congress slashed the MPP budget in 1992, and there is bipartisan support to abolish it. Yet Clinton demurs from further cuts.

Other sections of Clinton's program are equally disingenuous. For example, the majority of what Clinton calls "cuts" take effect in 1996 and 1997. By then, a new five-year program of farm subsidies, due to begin in late 1995, will be in force. In all likelihood, the new payments will be considerably lower than they are now. So Clinton's tough figures might even be *increases* in subsidies on the likely 1996 and 1997 figures. Far from wresting agricultural spending cuts from a reluctant Congress, Congress may actually be wresting spending cuts from an overly pandering president.

Clinton's proposals for increased Agriculture Department spending are even more disappointing than his phantom budget cuts. The administration will actually increase the USDA food stamp program by $9 billion, terming it an "investment." The increase is intended partly to compensate low-income Americans for higher energy taxes. Clinton also plans to "stimulate" rural America by increasing a favorite farm-state congressional pork program—Farmers Home Administration and Rural Development Administration loans for businesses, housing and local governments—by almost $10 billion over four years. But the default rate on this easy money is notoriously high: the GAO estimates that as much as 70 percent of the FMHA's current farm loan portfolio could eventually default, costing taxpayers up to $14 billion. Rather than digging the federal government out of debt, Clinton may actually be digging it further in.

Clinton does propose some respectable budget reforms, such as ending the interest rate subsidy on Rural Electrification Administration loans, reducing low-priority agricultural research, reforming the subsidized federal crop insurance program and consolidating many of the 12,000 local office buildings that USDA agencies have scattered across the country. But most of these reforms are mild-mannered, "good government" type changes that should have been made long ago. The only commodity program Clinton proposes to abolish, in fact, is the honey program—one of the smallest of all subsidies, which will cost only $17 million this year. Not exactly "reinventing government." More like nipping at the edges of a scandal.

JAMES BOVARD

James Bovard is the author of *The Fair Trade Fraud* (St. Martin's Press) and *The Farm Fiasco* (ICS Press).

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percent significantly undercuts the rate increases. But it's much worse than that. By creating a big differential between the top regular rate and the capital gains rate, it also creates huge opportunities for tax shelters—what we technicians call "tax arbitrage." The idea, as in the past, will be to try to deduct the expenses of an investment against the regular 40 percent top rate, while paying tax on the profits at the 28 percent capital gains rate. It will take some effort to get around the passive loss deduction limits, but ways will be found, and then we'll be headed back to the days of "negative" tax rates. There will be lots of tax shelter investments that are more profitable after-tax than before-tax—even some that lose money before tax yet pay handsomely when the "tax arbitrage" is taken into account. That will not only undermine tax fairness; it will also send investment capital chasing tax advantages rather than what's best for the economy. A far better option would be a slightly lower top rate that applies to all income, including capital gains.

Clinton's proposed plan would also weaken the individual alternative minimum tax—which was designed to make rich people pay some significant tax no matter how many loopholes their accountants might discover—in that the plan would allow people to take a tax deduction for the untaxed appreciation of assets donated to charity, even under the minimum tax. The general tax-policy rationale for the charitable deduction is that income given away to serve the public good shouldn't be taxed. Fair enough. But it's not fair to give donors a write-off for unrealized gains that they never declare as income on their tax returns. That's why current law says donors can't get such a "double-dip" for minimum tax purposes.

Yes, Senate Finance Committee chairman Daniel Patrick Moynihan likes this proposed loophole; he thinks it would encourage donations of artworks to museums. But the minimum tax was first established way back in 1969 specifically to deal with abuses of the tax break for gifts of appreciated property, which the Treasury found was the single biggest reason why hundreds of hugely wealthy people were paying no income tax. If Clinton must concede anything, he should at least target the break narrowly, with a fixed or percentage cap on the amount of deductible untaxed appreciation. There's no good political, let alone substantive, rationale for expanding the loophole to donations of stocks and bonds, real estate or other assets.

The plan does include a two-point hike in the top corporate tax rate and about a dozen welcome corporate tax reforms, including limits on business meals and entertainment write-offs and reduced tax breaks for multinational oil companies. On their own, these changes raise an average of $13 billion a year over the next five-and-a-half years. Yet that's mostly offset by about a dozen proposed new corporate tax concessions, estimated to cost $9 billion or so a year. These tax breaks are classified as spending or "investments." But it's hard to imagine that anyone would really design spending programs with the effects that these provisions will have.

A central element of the stimulus package is to bring back the investment tax credit on a temporary, "incremental" basis for bigger companies and permanently for smaller firms. But because most large businesses plan ahead, almost all of the temporary credit will be retroactive, rewarding companies for what they've already done or committed to do. That's especially true since it's so hard for a company to know in advance if it will be eligible for the complicated "incremental" credit. In fact, big business has been negative about both a temporary and an incremental credit.

Incremental or not, restoring an investment credit is a bad idea. Congress wisely repealed the credit back in 1986, noting that it had done nothing to stimulate the economy and had merely created distortions. The official explanation of the 1986 Tax Reform Act added: "As the world economy becomes increasingly competitive, it is most important that investment in our capital stock be determined by market forces rather than by tax considerations." Over Reagan's first five loophole-ridden years in office, investment in industrial plant and equipment actually fell (in constant dollars). But from 1986 to 1989 (after the loopholes were closed), real industrial plant and equipment investment grew at a 5.1 percent annual rate. Restoring the investment tax credit is estimated to cost $29 billion over the next five years—assuming business lobbies don't succeed in turning the "temporary" tax break into a permanent one, as has happened so often in the past.

"Our plan seeks to attack tax subsidies that actually reward companies more for shutting their operations down here and moving them overseas," Clinton said in his speech. That's a good idea, but the actual plan moves in two directions on this issue. On the one hand, it offers a very substantial tax break to American multinational companies that undertake research and development in the United States and use that R&D to support their foreign operations. Since it's easier to move manufacturing jobs abroad than to transplant high-skilled research facilities, this looks more like an incentive to export plants and jobs than to promote American R&D. The plan recognizes this problem, because it proposes complicated rules to make American corporations pay higher taxes if they use their U.S. research in foreign manufacturing. This all looks complex enough to be open to major abuse. Why not just encourage companies to allocate R&D expenses the right way in the first place?

In defense of his proposal to increase the corporate tax rate from 34 percent to 36 percent, Clinton argued that "large, highly profitable companies will have to pay a greater portion of their net earnings in taxes." But at the same time, he proposed to weaken the alternative minimum tax on corporations by providing bigger AMT depreciation write-offs. The companies that have been lobbying so hard for this tax break are among the ones that used to pay little or nothing in taxes under the old, pre-1986 tax system. They may talk about the "cost of

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capital," but the real issue is whether they should pay any significant taxes at all.

"Because small business has created such a high percentage of all the new jobs in our nation over the last ten or fifteen years," Clinton said, "our plan includes the boldest targeted incentives for small business in history," offering "new rewards for entrepreneurs who take new risks." But if small business is already doing so well in creating jobs, why rock the boat? Why would anyone want to encourage small-business investors to redirect their money from what sound business practices dictate and into "risky" activities that they otherwise don't think are worthwhile? Yet that's exactly what the proposed 50 percent capital gains tax cut for profits from selling certain small-business stock (on top of the general 30 percent exclusion in the program) is supposed to do.

Clinton was right to criticize "the sorry legacy of twelve years of short-sightedness, mismanagement and protection of the privileged." He was right to insist that "all this must change," and that the government must get its fiscal house in order. But tax-shelter, loophole-based economics was at the heart of the discredited "supply-side" policies that got us into our current mess. Restoring the loopholes won't get us out of it.

ROBERT S. MCINTYRE is director of Citizens for Tax Justice.

The real threat to Clinton's plan.

THE JOBLESS RECOVERY

By John B. Judis

At the beginning of *A Vision of Change for America*, the 145-page book detailing Bill Clinton's economic program, he declares his "overarching theme":

> To ensure more productive, higher-wage jobs and greater economic opportunities for ourselves and our children, we need to devote a larger share of our current resources to modernizing factories and equipment, developing skills and accelerating the advance of technology.

Clinton's program certainly does devote more resources to modernization—from $9.5 billion worth of investment tax credits to a $646 million subsidy for developing magnetic levitation and high-speed trains. But its other concern is creating "500,000 new jobs by the end of 1994" and "millions of new jobs in dozens of new industries moving confidently toward the twenty-first century." The deep problem of Clintonomics is that these two objectives may actually be contradictory. Faster technological change and rapid economic growth may not inevitably lead to more high-wage jobs and greater economic opportunities. They could even lead to *fewer* jobs. Forces may be at work—long coming and more deeply rooted than any short-term economic cycle—that cast a dark shadow over Clinton's economic strategy and that will make it difficult for him to succeed, no matter how well-crafted and well-intentioned his program.

By strict definition, the recession ended in March 1991 when growth turned positive, but unemployment is now higher than it was then. According to the U.S. Labor Department, output rose 2.2 percent during 1992 and productivity shot up 2.7 percent, but the net hours that Americans worked declined. This year looks very similar. Statistics showing expanding GNP have been accompanied by reports of massive layoffs at IBM, General Motors, Sears, Northwest Airlines and other large corporations, and small business has been affected as well.

Clinton and some economists have attributed this "jobless recovery" to the Bush administration's faulty policies, but it is better understood as part of a recurrent trend in the American economy that began in the 1920s, and reappeared in the late 1950s and again in the early 1990s. In each case advances in technology and industrial organization brought about fewer jobs. From 1919 to 1929 manufacturing output grew 60 percent, but the manufacturing work force actually declined 0.6 percent. From 1957 to 1964 output doubled while the number of production workers shrank by 3 percent. We now appear to be in a similar situation. All of this reflects the fundamental metamorphosis of American capitalism from an economy whose growth depends on the expansion of its labor force to an economy whose growth depends, paradoxically, on its contraction.

Replacing jobs with technology is potentially liberating—it has freed many Americans from unremitting toil geared to self-preservation. But it can also lead to permanent recession and to a kind of occupational apartheid in which large portions of the population become economically marginalized. In the past, Americans eventually overcame these dangers, but not without wrenching changes in the economy and in the way in which they understood their lives. The decades that fol-

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lowed the 1920s and the 1950s marked major turning points both in the American experience and in the structure of the American economy. America may now stand poised at a similar transition. The challenge for the Clinton administration will be to promote modernization without plunging the country into another dark age of depression. It can't do this without understanding the pitfalls, as well as the promise, of technological advance.

Mainstream economists, reared on a neoclassical model, portray modern economic history as a process of self-adjustment. When one area of employment lapses, another automatically arises to take its place. But some dissenting social scientists and historians have been acutely aware of the unruly dilemma that haunts modern capitalism. In 1930 John Maynard Keynes, surveying the British and American economies, wrote, "We are being afflicted with a new disease ... *technological unemployment.*" In 1964 Robert Theobald, W. H. Ferry, Michael Harrington and others issued a manifesto, *The Triple Revolution,* warning that a new "cybernation revolution" would create mass unemployment unless society was reorganized to accommodate it. But the most compelling explanation of the new phenomenon was offered by the historian Martin J. Sklar in a 1969 essay published in an obscure journal called *Radical America.* (Sklar's essay was republished last year by Cambridge University Press in *The United States as a Developing Nation.*) Borrowing from Hegel, Marx and the classical economists, Sklar argued that during the 1920s the United States passed from an economy based on the accumulation of capital to one based on what he called the disaccumulation of capital.

Sklar distinguished the process of capital accumulation, which characterized the first 500 years of capitalism, from the process of disaccumulation, which began to appear in the 1920s. The classical economists understood the ingredients of capital—goods, plant and equipment and even money—as embodiments of labor time, and the accumulation of capital as the accumulation of labor time. They anticipated that as production expanded and capital accumulated, the working class too would expand until it virtually dominated society. Indeed, by the early twentieth century, blue-collar industrial workers constituted about 40 percent of the work force in America and almost 60 percent in Great Britain.

But then, as Sklar's study of the 1920s showed, the trend toward a giant industrial class suddenly halted, and even began to reverse itself. The production of goods increased rapidly, but the amount of labor time embodied in them did not. Capital itself began to disaccumulate.

Disaccumulation first appeared in agriculture. Then, during the 1920s, as a result of Frederick Taylor and Henry Ford's new methods of industrial organization, the replacement of steam and human muscle by electricity and internal combustion and the introduction of new technology, it spread to manufacturing. From 1920 to 1929 the total number of workers engaged in all goods production fell from 12,828,000 to 11,958,000, while the total in manufacturing fell more sharply from 10,658,000 to 9,562,000.

The immediate consequence of disaccumulation was far from liberating. Simultaneous growth and unemployment created a crisis of effective demand, as increases in productivity easily outran increases in wages. American farmers and business tried to prevent a downturn by seeking export markets, but as the world market itself began to contract, the United States was plunged into a depression from which there was no obvious escape within the existing framework of American capitalism. America finally extricated itself from the Great Depression, but only by going to war. By creating immense artificial demand for new goods and siphoning off half the labor force into military service, World War II essentially solved the problem posed by disaccumulation. And after the war, pent-up consumer demand fueled a boom in home construction and automobile manufacturing. Discoveries of plastics and synthetic fibers opened up new branches of the chemical industry.

Government and business also took steps that wittingly and unwittingly countered the trend toward disaccumulation. Business expanded into areas of life that had previously been dominated by non-capitalist production. Firms now made home appliances, grocery stores sold prepared foods, Sears sold ready-to-wear clothing for the working classes; new businesses sold leisure and entertainment for a profit; entrepreneurs sold mental health, sexual potency and charm. The government too played an important role in preventing a new depression, by creating artificial demand for goods through civilian spending on highways and other infrastructure, military spending and federal mortgage financing. Government spending rose from 9.8 percent of GNP in 1929 to 28.8 percent in 1961. In 1957 military purchases accounted for 10.3 percent of GNP compared with 0.7 percent in 1929.

However, by the mid-1950s there were signs that the United States was on the verge of another disaccumulation crisis. Employment in manufacturing peaked in 1953, the last year of the Korean War, and began to decline. Unemployment reached a postwar high of 6.8 percent in 1958 and was a dangerously high 10.6 percent among the producers of steel, auto and other durable goods. Even after production rebounded in the late '50s and early '60s, employment did not. Measured from the peak of the recession in 1958, the number of auto workers declined by 10 percent over the next four years, and the number of chemical workers by 2 percent.

There were other disturbing signs of economic distress. Although the United States had avoided a recurrence of the Great Depression, parts of the population remained particularly vulnerable to the effects of disaccumulation. Blacks and Hispanic immigrants, who migrated to Northern cities during the '50s, did not find the bonanza of unskilled manufacturing jobs that had existed during and after World War II. They increasingly formed isolated pockets of poverty within

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cities. Their plight showed up in relative unemployment figures. In 1940 non-white unemployment was 112 percent that of whites; by 1962 it was 225 percent. In 1953 black teenage unemployment was 113 percent that of whites; ten years later it was 181 percent. In a 1964 study of black unemployment, the economist Dale Heistand concluded that "Negro gains in operative occupations during the 1940s and 1950s are now increasingly susceptible to recent technological and market changes."

During the early '60s some American policy intellectuals believed the United States was entering a period of deepening recession and social unrest. The authors of *The Triple Revolution* even warned of a new depression. Once again, as in the 1940s, government and business took measures to counteract the tendency toward disaccumulation. The Kennedy administration and its successors adopted a strategy of deficit spending to overcome the potential lack of effective demand. As a result, since 1961 the federal budget has run a deficit every year but one. The Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon administrations also dramatically increased welfare spending on those left outside the new capitalism. At the same time, business began encouraging private consumer debt—through installment buying, credit cards and loans. Private credit increased 210 percent during the '60s and 268 percent during the '70s.

Government military spending also played a role initially in overcoming tendencies toward stagnation. Manufacturing employment increased from 17 million at the start of the Vietnam escalation in 1964 to 20 million in 1969, when Richard Nixon began to wind down American participation. But manufacturing would never rise significantly above that level again. During the 1970s and 1980s all the gains in employment occurred within private and public services, as American capitalism expanded outside the older channels of goods production.

From 1970 to 1980 the fastest-growing occupations were in health care, restaurants (particularly fast-food) and social services. Health employment rose 164 percent, entertainment and recreation occupations rose 145 percent, educational occupations went up 130 percent, social services 170 percent, financial jobs 149 percent and government employment 129 percent. By contrast, manufacturing employment did not increase at all.

As Americans changed their economic lives, they also changed the way they understood their lives. The process of capital accumulation placed a premium on saving in order to invest. Economic growth required the constant enlargement of the capital goods sector by diverting profits and wages from consumer goods producers. The ethic of capital accumulation was one of delayed gratification and even asceticism—as described in Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.*

By contrast, the era of disaccumulation has been plagued by the constant threat of insufficient demand. Its reigning ethic has been consumerism, hedonism and even narcissism. Beginning in the 1920s, when department stores and advertising first flourished, Americans were actively encouraged to find pleasure in buying products they made. After World War II, and particularly beginning in the 1960s, Americans were prodded to carve out personal lives that were distinct from their working existences and even from the responsibilities of family life. Sexuality was severed from reproduction and made into a realm of personal fulfillment and identification.

Prior to the twentieth century, no one except the very wealthy had what is now called a "personal life." As the historian Eli Zaretsky has argued in *Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life*, sexual liberation, gay rights and modern feminism were all products of the new post-1920s capitalism. The need to find consumers also gave birth to credit cards, shopping malls and consumer protection. The spread of capitalism into new areas led to theme parks, Club Med, McDonald's, fitness salons, spectator sports and cable television. These kinds of enterprises didn't simply reflect the inevitable growth of technology and human needs. They were a direct result of American capitalism coming to terms with the threat and the promise of disaccumulation.

But during the last decade the tendency toward disaccumulation has begun to re-emerge. Advances in computer automation made it possible to reduce labor time drastically in both manufacturing and services. The rise in foreign competition, particularly from Western Europe and Japan, forced American businesses to cut costs—often by introducing labor-saving technology. The cold war's end removed the rationale for military spending. And foreign competition made continued deficit financing far more problematic.

The trend again showed up dramatically in manufacturing. From 1979 to 1992 the manufacturing work force declined by 15 percent, while output increased 35 percent. Indeed, the decline showed up well before the recent recession. From 1980 to 1987 the number of workers manufacturing machinery dropped 16 percent and the number of workers in chemical industries declined 12 percent. Most alarming, however, was that, beginning in the mid-'80s, the effects of disaccumulation began to spread to the service industries. From 1980 to 1987 the number of non-production workers in manufacturing fell by 1 percent after rising steadily since 1945. Many of the strongest categories of job expansion in the '70s, such as entertainment, social services and education, slowed during the '80s. In a study of job displacement, economist Michael Podgursky found that from 1986 to 1990 the greatest increase in job displacement occurred among services such as grocery stores, eating and drinking places, business services and printing and publishing, rather than in manufacturing.

In previous recessions, the rise in service employment compensated for the decline in manufacturing, but this time many services increased their productivity at the expense of their labor force. Retail trade, insurance and finance all lost jobs, and the only services to register sig-

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nificant increases were health care, which provided one of six new jobs during the 1980s, and government, which now employs more people than manufacturing does. In 1991 total white-collar employment increased only 0.2 percent, the lowest annual increase in twenty years.

Disaccumulation again disproportionately affected inner-city minorities. During the 1982-83 recession, for instance, Milwaukee lost 60,000 manufacturing jobs. During the rest of the '80s the city added new midlevel white-collar jobs in information services, but it gained back only 9,000 manufacturing jobs. Milwaukee's black community was devastated by the loss of these jobs. One in five Milwaukee blacks became unemployed. More than half went on public assistance. The 1990 recession also hit states and regions that previously had been immune to downturns because of military spending. In California 800,000 manufacturing workers lost their jobs during the recession. One hundred years ago these workers would have found other manufacturing jobs, but today there is little prospect that the expansion of production will create sufficient manufacturing jobs to employ them. The computer chip maker Intel, for instance, is investing $400 million in a new plant in Santa Clara—but the plant will employ only 250 people.

The loss of manufacturing jobs in Southern California undoubtedly contributed to the anger and despair that fueled the Los Angeles riots. As reported by researcher Kevin Kearns of the Washington-based Manufacturing Policy Project, blacks were disproportionately concentrated in the aircraft and missile-space vehicle manufacturing plants in Los Angeles that suffered from massive layoffs at the end of the '80s. The jobless rate among 16- to 19-year-old blacks was 42.6 percent prior to the riots.

The new crisis of disaccumulation, which is Clinton's real economic inheritance, may turn out to be more severe and protracted than the one that occurred thirty years ago. In the early '60s the United States escaped the threat of simultaneous growth and unemployment by adopting and enlarging measures that had already been initiated earlier—deficit financing, military spending and the expansion of services. But this time we may not have recourse to any of these measures.

As computers take over the white-collar workplace, the trend toward higher productivity and less employment in services can be expected to increase in the next decade. Writing in 1985, economist J. David Roessner predicted a 30 percent decline in bank and insurance company employment by 2000. Employment in other less productive services, including education and entertainment and recreation, may continue to grow, but if the last decade is any indication, they will not easily make up for the decline in clerical and manufacturing workers.

Barring an unforeseen threat from abroad, military spending will continue to decline. Government can replace much of this spending with spending on the environment, infrastructure and high technology—leading, perhaps, to a social-environmental industrial complex that will replace the old military-industrial complex—but there are currently severe fiscal and political limits on how much public investment the government can undertake.

Wherever the Clinton administration turns, it faces dilemmas created by the tendency toward disaccumulation. Take three major areas of the Clinton economic program: industrial policy, national health insurance reform and welfare reform.

Industrial policy: Clinton has good reason to help industries to modernize and to use the most advanced technology. If American industries don't, they'll lose out to the Japanese and the Western Europeans, and Americans will be deprived of substantial economic benefits. Such industries as telecommunications, aircraft, biotechnology and computers and computer software enjoy the highest rate of profit, provide the highest salaries and create the innovations that sustain other manufacturing and service industries. They also generate a large trade surplus. But enabling these industries to become more productive and competitive will contribute to a net reduction in Americans' labor time. It will accelerate disaccumulation.

Health insurance reform: Clinton has good reason to contain health care costs and make coverage universal. Health care costs have made American industry less competitive and are the largest single factor driving up the budget deficit. The threat of losing health insurance also ties people to welfare and to dead-end jobs. But any meaningful health care reform will drastically slow the growth of health care jobs—particularly white-collar ones. (It now takes more people to administer Blue Cross in Massachusetts than to administer the entire Canadian health insurance system.) This will eliminate what has been the principal source of new jobs during the last two decades and deprive the American economy of another safety valve against disaccumulation.

Welfare and workfare: Clinton has good reason to attack the culture of poverty that afflicts many inner-city ghettos, making their residents resistant to the American promise of upward mobility through work. He has proposed requiring welfare recipients to take jobs after two years. But the process of disaccumulation is eliminating the kind of entry-level jobs that permitted older blacks and ethnic immigrants to rise in their station. If the government wants welfare recipients to work, it will either have to supplement their income from low-wage jobs or create its own public works and social service jobs. Either way, the government will have to undertake enormous expenditures that will further threaten the deficit.

Clinton's 145-page program includes many good ideas and the most serious presidential plan for curbing the deficit in a generation. But it doesn't contain the solution to these dilemmas. They, and the underlying crisis caused by simultaneous growth and unemployment, will continue to haunt Clinton and the country for the remainder of his first term, if not for the remainder of the century. •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Fantasy and Fandom

The best thing about **Groundhog Day** (Columbia) is that it doesn't explain. It's a fantasy, right in the middle of reality, and the film never explains how the fantastic situation came about or why it goes away. This is a relief from the avuncular angel of *It's a Wonderful Life* or the mad scientist of *Back to the Future.* The existence of the fantasy, says this film, is itself part of the fantasy.

We are in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, where perhaps we have never yearned to be. It is February 2, a recent one, in this town not far from Pittsburgh, during the annual celebration that is the town's chief claim to fame. People watch a groundhog emerge and decide, based on whether or not it sees its shadow, that winter will continue for six weeks or spring will soon begin.

To report on this nerve-tingling event comes a T.V. team from Pittsburgh, including a weatherman, Bill Murray, and his producer, Andie MacDowell. Murray has covered this story six or seven times before, and he regards these annual pilgrimages as reminders that he is still a minor figure on a minor station. He grouses, struts and frets with as much sour egotism as MacDowell and the cameraman, Chris Elliott, can suffer.

Murray runs the gamut of small-town banalities in the bed-and-breakfast where he stays overnight and on his way to the groundhog celebration. The team shoots its footage and starts home; but they are delayed by a blizzard, which Murray did not predict the day before on his broadcast. They must return to—O dread word—Punxsutawney.

Back in the same bed-and-breakfast, the clock-radio wakes him again at 6 a.m. next morning. But it is not next morning: it is February 2 all over again. At first Murray thinks the radio station is just playing yesterday's tape, but when he looks out the window, he sees people hurrying toward the groundhog celebration again; and, detail by detail, this day repeats the day before. It *is* the day before, except that he knows it's not. Neither MacDowell nor Elliott nor anyone else is aware that February 2 is being repeated.

To make a not-too-long story short—it's just long enough—Murray repeats Groundhog Day dozens of times, synoptically handled as we go along, and he takes advantage of the fact that (a) he knows what's going to happen and (b) he won't have to suffer consequences tomorrow for anything he does today because there won't be any tomorrow. He can gorge fiendishly on sweets without putting on weight. He can use a proposal of marriage with a local young woman merely as a bedding ploy. He can rob an armored truck because he knows exactly the moment in which the cash will be unguarded. (Omitted wrinkles: he could have bet on horses or played the market, except that next day, he would again be back at Square One.)

In the course of time, though time is not exactly the word, he resigns himself to this calendar repetition, and also he begins to learn from it: not didactically but in a gradual perception that self-centeredness is actually less rewarding than generosity. Of course this is just substituting one form of gratification for another, but at least it allows for companionship—with, principally, MacDowell. This change springs him from the mine-trap.

But nothing, in the entrapment or the escape, is the smallest bit mystical. Murray is in a film, and the film was written by Danny Rubin and Harold Ramis, and Ramis directed, and that's all. This self-containment is pleasant because it snaps its fingers at cosmic powers and it shows that one potential of film is to do what it pleases with actualities.The result of this blitheness about actuality is some quiet charm, both in the story itself and in our relish of humankind's power over its usual powerlessness, for a couple of hours anyway, just by making a film that snaps its fingers.

Groundhog Day proves another point, more familiar: some actors can rise above their material, others cannot. The two lead actors here cannot, and are lucky in this instance. MacDowell has been hard to take in most films since *sex, lies, and videotape,* either because the script was poor or she was miscast. Neither is true here, and she gleams—a bit, anyway. Murray, more often than not, is pretty unbearable; but here, playing a man who is unbearable, Murray begins convincingly, amusingly, and gets even more amusing as he metamorphoses.

Michelle Pfeiffer wants to become

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Hoffa. *A treat for those who like eruptive acting (Jack Nicholson) and swift directing (Danny DeVito). An American morality tale etched in acid. (Reviewed 1/18/93)* **Intervista.** *Sheer delight . . . well, there's also some pathos and mystery. Federico Fellini weaves a scintillating fabric out of an attempt by some T.V. journalists to interview him. (12/7/92)* **The Oak.** *Romania. 1988. Lucian Pintilie directs a pitch-black comedy about two lovers in Ceausescu-time, with Maia Morgenstern extraordinary as a headstrong dissident. (2/8/93)* **Riff-Raff.** *We join, quite willingly, a rowdy gang of London construction workers, in Ken Loach's funny-gritty comedy-drama. (2/15/93)* **—SK**

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familiar by being continually unfamiliar. She keeps trying roles that ask different qualities and resources of her, and my only reservation about this splendid ambition is that she doesn't always succeed fully. A hash house waitress (*Frankie and Johnny*), a French aristo (*Dangerous Liaisons*) are only two of the attempts. Now, in **Love Field** (Orion), she plays a ninny of a Texas wife, a role that combines elements of Geena Davis in *Thelma and Louise*, Ellen Burstyn in *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* and Rebecca De Mornay in *The Trip to Bountiful*.

Pfeiffer is appealing but not commanding. We see what she is doing and can see that she is doing it pretty well; but with better actors, we don't, in a sense, see what they are doing. With them, the character exists. With Pfeiffer, the creation always seems en route.

In this screenplay by Don Roos, Pfeiffer suddenly leaves her (stock-part) prole husband in their Dallas tract house and lights out for Washington by bus. On the bus she meets a black man, Dennis Haysbert, and his small daughter, Stephanie McFadden. With a sort of intrusive good-heartedness, Pfeiffer gets involved in the lives and troubles of father and daughter and ends up being a fugitive with them. In the course of their flight, her life changes.

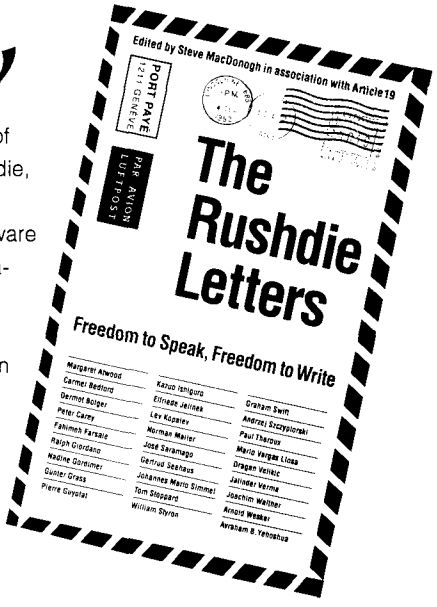
What I've omitted from this brief account is that Pfeiffer is a Jack and Jackie Kennedy fan, that the year is 1963, that Love Field refers to the Dallas airport and that the reason for Pfeiffer's trip to Washington is to attend Kennedy's funeral. The fact that the core of the story can be given, fairly, without mention of the Kennedy elements is what's wrong with the picture.

No analogy or resonance exists between the Kennedy story and Pfeiffer's. (Except that Jackie and she have both lost children. How special an analogy is that?) With all the busy setting-up of the Kennedy elements at the start and their continuance throughout, we expect some sort of counterpoint between the two stories. There is none. Pfeiffer could have been going to Washington for any other reason that might take one there.

Yet the us-on-a-bus motif has some grip simply as a device; and Pfeiffer does convey a sweet, resolute bewilderment. Haysbert is large, strong, patient—exactly what we want this character to be in this arrangement—and the small McFadden is directed gently by Jonathan Kaplan. A special bow to Louise Latham: she plays an elderly Virginian with whom the fugitives spend a night, and she makes us long for her quietly proud hospitality. •

To whom it may concern,

In February 1989 Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran sentenced to death Salman Rushdie, author of the Satanic Verses, and "all involved in its publication who were aware of its content." Four years later, internationally renowned authors write public letters to Rushdie, responding to the most extreme example of censorship in modern times. This volume collects their letters, Rushdie's reply, his essay on his exile, "A Thousand Days in a Balloon," and a chronology of the *fatwa*.



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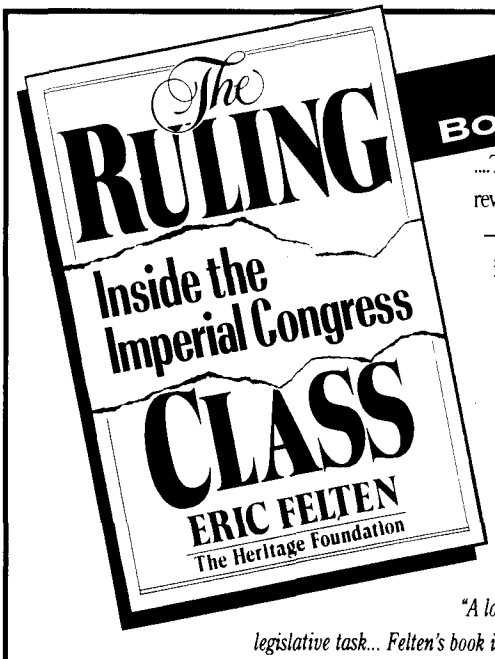

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The scary purity of John Cage.

No Ear for Music

By Richard Taruskin

I.

Lenny Bruce had a routine in which he sent audiences into paroxysms by classifying any artifact of contemporary culture to which they referred him as Jewish or goyish. The high point, on the recording that I heard, came when someone shouted, I think, "instant scrambled eggs," and Bruce went, "ooh ... scary goyish." There is no better way of understanding what John Cage has meant to us, why he was so notorious and then so famous, and why his name will long remain an emblem. For half a century he stalked the world of music as its scariest goy.

This has nothing to do with religion, of course, or with the ethnic complexion of the music world. (Bruce's audiences were not all Jewish.) It is not even a question of Us and Them. What made the classification funny was that all the mundane items classified belonged to Us. The classification showed up the contradictions in the shared culture, and in its values. What was "Jewish" confirmed our cherished notions of ourselves; what was "goyish" disconfirmed them. But confirmation and disconfirmation alike begot a shock of recognition—as did Cage. It was always vexingly clear that this disconfirming presence was not only in the music world, but oh, so tellingly and chillingly *of* it.

People often wrote him off as a jester, with his homemade instruments ("prepared" pianos jangling with inserted household objects, pots-'n'-pans percussion orchestras), his anarchic happenings and "musicircuses," his pieces for radios (or for nothing at all), his music-generating games of chance (latterly high-tech, computerized), his New Agey orientalism, his inscrutable droning lectures ("magnificently boring," his new biographer says). But no, you don't get mad at jesters, or at mere eccentrics, and everybody got mad at Cage. As the critic Peter Yates once put it, Cage's name was always "popping up like the Devil in Punch and Judy" in the grimmer music journals, "to be batted down each time by verbal bludgeon or flung brick." (Lukas Foss invited Cage actually to play the Devil in a performance in 1966 of Stravinsky's *Histoire du soldat*, and Cage recalled that "everybody thought I was well cast.") When Cage masterminded a complete nineteen-hour performance of *Vexations*, a homely little chorale for piano by Erik Satie (Cage's anti-Beethovenizing hero and another reputed jester) that carried the direction "play 840 times," many were not amused. "While the avant-garde played on, couldn't they hear Satie's chuckling?" one critic wrote. "The old master of *blague* continues to victimize his squarish disciples."

That critic was righter than he knew. Though late in life he grinned a lot and (besieged by interviewers) became a fount of self-protecting whimsy, Cage was fabulously humorless and literalistic, every bit as ascetic as his most truculent critics, the elite modernists of academe. He was just as esoteric, just as contemptuous of the crowd, just as determined to have no purpose that could be called good or useful. Norman O. Brown saw right through Cage's defenses—the studied naïveté, the Holy Foolery—when he called Cage the quintessential Apollonian. Yes, indeed: never was a musician more cerebral or less sensuous, and, for all his lifelong involvement with dancers, never one less attuned to physical impulse. (Nothing, except perhaps lovely harmony, so repelled Cage in any music as a beat.)

No one was ever less a master of *blague*. The slightest sense of irony would have made the fanatical intensity with which he carried out his mission impossible. What for years kept Cage from going through with *4'33"* (pronounced "four-thirty-three"), his so-called silent piece, was his fear that "it would appear as if I were making a joke." One might even say that no one ever had less appreciation for Satie's obvious qualities than his most fervent American disciple; but misunderstanding of this sort, as we know perfectly well without any help from Harold Bloom, is precisely what drives the history of art. Virgil Thomson imitated Satie and was barren. John Cage completely misread him and became charismatically fecund.

Thus, on one of the many Cage C.D.s on the Wergo label one can hear an affecting performance of Satie's magnum opus, the Platonic "symphonic drama" *Socrate*, followed by *Cheap Imitation*, Cage's chance-determined recomposition of the piece. All the music's humanity, all its communicative warmth, is systematically, anhedonically squeezed out. On a Hat Hut disc, following Cage's suggestion that its individual parts may be extracted for performance *ad libitum*, Eberhard Blum has overdubbed the three very sparse flute lines from *Atlas Eclipticalis*, the huge orchestral work that became famous when the New York Philharmonic rebelled against it in 1964. It is sixty minutes of virtual sensory deprivation, a discipline that, inflicted on an audience of non-adepts, can seem an act of puritanical aggression. Whoever started the rumor that this composer was Mr. Fun?

It was a defensive myth created and circulated by academic modernists in order to marginalize the one who always managed to seem so effortlessly further-out-than-thou. That apparent effortlessness

The Roaring Silence
John Cage: A Life
by David Revill
(Arcade, 375 pp., $27.95)

Conversing with Cage
edited by Richard Kostelanetz
(Limelight, 300 pp., $14.95 paper)

Correspondence et documents
by Pierre Boulez and John Cage
edited by Jean-Jacques Nattiez
(Amadeus, 234 pp., Swiss Fr. 48)

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The Arditti Quartet
(Mode 17 & 27)

The Perilous Night; Four Walls
Margaret Leng Tan
(New Albion 37)

Lecture on Nothing; Works for Cello
Frances-Marie Uitti
(Etcetera 2016)

Richard Taruskin is the author most recently of *Musorgsky: Eight Essays and an Epilogue* (Princeton University Press).

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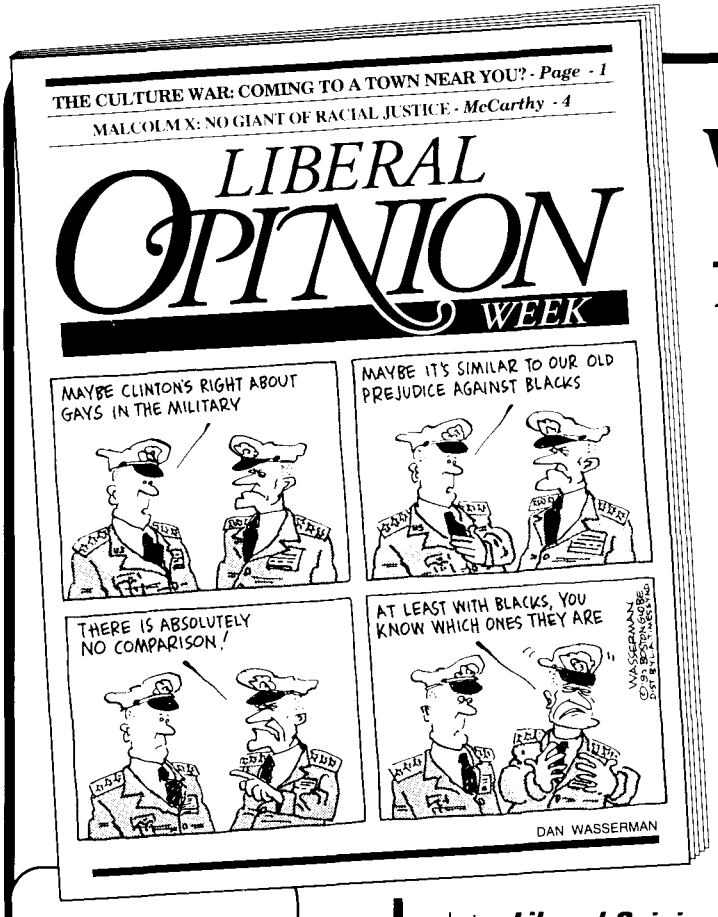
THE CULTURE WAR: COMING TO A TOWN NEAR YOU? - Page - 1
MALCOLM X: NO GIANT OF RACIAL JUSTICE - McCarthy - 4
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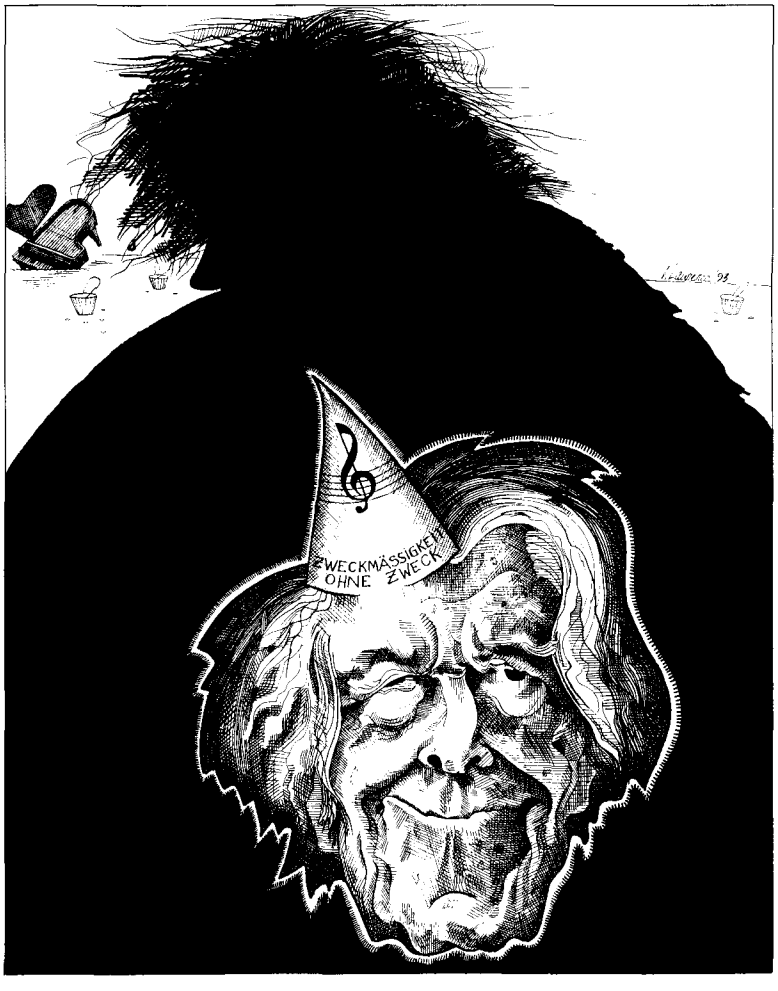
was what enraged people and made them vengeful. Where uptowners like Milton Babbitt sweated anxiously over complicated "precompositional" serial schemes, Cage just sat in his loft tossing coins. In a celestially snooty review of Cage's book *Silence*, John Hollander tried to exorcise the baleful presence by proposing that Cage's activity finally lacked "a certain kind of hard work" identified with perfectionism, "that peculiar labor of art itself, the incredible agony of the real artist in his struggles with lethargy and with misplaced zeal, with despair and with the temptations of his recent successes, *to get better*."

But one of the things you learn from David Revill's useful if somewhat reverential biography is how hard Cage worked, how doggedly he pursued his clearly envisaged goals. His schemes were just as complicated, just as exacting, just as pitiless, as any serialist's. Chance operations were anything but labor-saving. To put together the *Williams Mix*, Cage's first tape piece, he and Earle Brown chained themselves to the splicing table for five months, twelve hours a day. His works went through false starts and rejected drafts as often as any other composer's. His methods guaranteed no tautological success, and he suffered a fair measure of agony.

By Hollander's definition, then, Cage was a "real artist." What he was *not* was legit. What he lacked, almost totally, were traditional conservatory skills, even baby ear-training. "The whole pitch aspect of music eludes me," he cheerfully told an interviewer. (You might as well say, "The whole lexical aspect of literature eludes me," or "The whole color aspect of painting eludes me.") Any success that such a musician might enjoy would devalue legitimacy. Which is scary, especially to those who traded on ever more exigent and exclusionary standards of legitimation.

Where the activities of conventional modernists had to flaunt their difficulty, Cage's were of another order. They were so mindless at times as to seem *infra dig* not only to clubby professionals, but even to the average onlooker. "There are people who say, 'If music's that easy to write, I could do it,'" Cage wrote. "Of course they could, but they don't." His art required heroic powers of renunciation, and what you had to renounce were the very things ("education and theory," as Cage once put it) that normally gained you prestige. While working on his monumentally serious piano cycle *Music of Changes* (1951), the first opus in which his compositional choices were entirely determined by operations adapted from the ancient Chinese divination manual known as the "Book of Changes" (*I Ching*), Cage apologized for writing a skimpy letter to Pierre Boulez, then a close friend: "You must realize that I spend a great deal of time tossing coins, and the emptiness of head that that induces begins to penetrate the rest of my time as well."



JOHN CAGE BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

The very elegance of the phrasing shows how much personality and cultivated intellect Cage had to be willing to renounce. But renunciation is shaming, and scary, and had to be denied; and so the myth of the jester was born. "I like fun," Hollander sneered, but "I shall resist the impulse to have as much fun being a critic as Mr. Cage has being a composer." Mr. Cage was not having fun. His motives did not differ from those of the composers that Hollander admired. His product in those days resembled theirs far more than they could afford to admit. All that differed were the means—and how! That means could matter so much more than motives and ends says a lot about modernism.

Music of Changes was written in emulation of Boulez's Second Piano Sonata, which had left Cage "trembling in the face of great complexity" when the composer played it for him in 1949. The work it most resembles, however, is Boulez's *Structures* for two pianos, written in 1952 under the reciprocal influence of Cage. What both composers accomplished with these works was the replacement of spontaneous compositional choices—choices that, in Cage's oft-incanted phrase, represented "memory, tastes, likes and dislikes"—with transcendent and impersonal procedures. It was a common goal in the early atomic age, when selves seemed frangible and insignificant. The difference between Boulez and Cage was only superficially a conflict between order and anarchy. It was, rather, a conflict between disciplines, both eminently authoritarian, both bent on stamping out the artist's puny person so that something "realer," less vulnerable, might emerge.

Cage's "chance operations," very rigorous and very tedious, were just as effective a path to transcendence as Boulez's or Babbitt's mathematical algorithms. Where Boulez, in the words of the Canadian scholar Roger Savage, "handed the work's structure over to the serial operations which control it," Cage ceremoniously handed the structure of his work over to Dame Fortune. The difference was that serial operations established multifarious arbitrary relationships among the events that took place in the score, while chance operations generated atomistic sequences in which every event was generated independently of every other. Cage's methods explicitly destroyed relationships ("weeded them out," he crowed) because attention to

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the fashioning of relationships, being egoistic, defeated impersonalism—and also, Cage thought, the reality of music.

"Composers," he wrote, "are spoken of as having ears for music which generally means that nothing presented to their ears can be heard by them." Boulez's product, being full of relationships, could be analyzed in traditional ways: its events could be reduced to principles; it could be conceptualized in "levels." All of which not only made the institutional wheels go round, but gave reassuring evidence of "an ear for music"—a controlling intelligence, a respectable moral accountability. But as Cage implied with his mischievous characterization of the "musical ear," the coherence of the serial structure could only be demonstrated conceptually—that is, on paper—to professionals. As increasing numbers of musicians are now willing to concede, there is no possibility of perceptual corroboration; and musical psychologists are beginning to suspect that the mind's structure may actually preclude the cognitive processing—the "understanding"—of non-hierarchical pitch and rhythmic information. Thus Cage's open renunciation of the discriminating, theory-laden "musical ear" in favor of the literal, physical, uncritically accepting biological ear was especially scary to postwar serialists, because it tainted their ostentatious rationalism with a hint of fraud, producing not just musical dissonance but cognitive dissonance, too.

The fact is, *Structures* and *Music of Changes*, while quite different in texture (Cage's piece is characteristically much sparser), impress the naked ear as equally desultory complexities, and induce an equally passive reception. In a blind test it would be impossible to tell which was the product of "total organization" and which the product of "random selection." The disquiet that this situation produced among the European (and, later, the American) serialists gave rise to casuistic denial and a mania for scholastic analysis that (as Cage deftly implied) all too easily replaced the sounding music as the primary focus of interest.

Cage's scary presence split the avant-garde into anxious "sentimental poets," the kind (as Schiller put it) "whose soul suffers no impression without at once turning to contemplate its own play," and "naive" ones, with Cage their king, who celebrate "the object itself," not "what the reflective understanding of the poet has made." While his antagonists did their dervish dance of negation, Cage could afford to grin. Self-schooled in "a spirit of acceptance, rather than a spirit of control," he gladly acknowledged the incomprehensibility of his results—and of theirs as well. Catching at the ancient aura of the sublime and so being truer than his opponents to the impulse that brought forth Schoenbergian atonality, Cage maintained "that the division is between understanding and experiencing, and many people think that art has to do with understanding, but it doesn't."

In other ways, too, radically though his means may have differed, Cage's ends meshed with those of his ostensible adversaries. He and Babbitt are often viewed (and surely viewed themselves) as antipodean figures, but they jointly embodied what may be called the "research" model (as opposed to the "communication" model) of composerly behavior, so characteristic of midcentury modernism. Both were wholly fixated on their own activity, on the game of making. Both were obsessed with formulating the rules of the game, with finding ever more efficient methods of production. And both were wholly unconcerned with reception.

"Who Cares If You Listen?" was the title (given by editors, but not inaccurately) of a famous article by Babbitt, published in 1958. Cage, according to Revill, rejected communication as a goal out of bitter personal experience. *The Perilous Night* (1943-44), a six-movement suite for prepared piano (superbly recorded by Margaret Leng Tan on the New Albion label) that Revill describes as "a lost, sad and rather desperate piece"—and that Cage himself has described in painful autobiographical terms we can now (partly thanks to Revill) link up with his traumatic sexual reorientation and divorce in 1945—was frivolously dismissed by a critic as sounding like "a woodpecker in a church belfry." The wounded composer talked about this experience for the rest of his life. Thenceforth "I could not accept the academic idea that the purpose of music was communication," he once observed. Another time, more strongly, he said that after the *Perilous Night* fiasco, "I determined to give up composition unless I could find a better reason for doing it than communication." The bruise that Cage received from an insouciant philistine turned him inward, and equipped him with the resentment and the aggression that a modernist giant needs.

What better reasons did he find? The one that he loved to adduce for interviewers was spiritualistic and Eastern, picked up in the '40s from an Indian friend, Gita Sarabhai, who said that the purpose of music was to "sober and quiet the mind, thus making it susceptible to divine influences." (Pressed, he produced a less "churchy" version: "The

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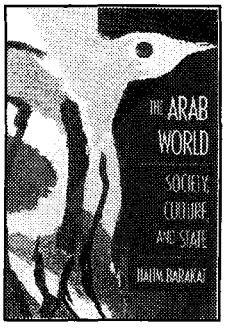

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function of music is to change the mind so that it does become open to experience, which inevitably is interesting.") Ultimate purposes, however, do not produce a program of action. For managing his career from day to day and work to work, Cage enthusiastically embraced the model—inherited, he always said, from his inventor father—of experimental science. Art justified itself in the making. Experiments could succeed or fail, but "sometimes they could tell you what to do next."

What made John Cage such a scary goy, then, was the way he reflected back at the orthodox—more consistently, more nonchalantly, more "honestly"—their own follies of extremism. And they hated him for it. But since the follies of modernism were the follies of the mainstream magnified, mainstream musicians also found in Cage a discomforting reflection.

And then suddenly they didn't. By the time the enfant terrible qualified for Medicare, he had been transformed into a grand old man (well, a sweet old guy) at whom no one ever got angry, at whom everyone grinned back, on whom everyone showered praise and thanks. Pockets of resistance lingered among the militant bourgeois, who disapproved of his lifestyle (he was a scary gay, too) and feared the destabilizing implications of his work for the "canon," and kept up a tired game of gotcha with this "liberator" who actually believed in rules (forgetting what was being liberated, and from whom), and pronounced his latter-day acceptance and prestige "symptoms of our era's poverty." But they were symptoms of something else. Somewhere between the early '60s and the late '70s, Cage and all his squabbling brethren had lost their teeth. He was no longer a threat. And that, if anything, defined the transition from the modern to the postmodern.

It is not that the world caught up to Cage. He was, rather, left behind; or kicked upstairs. (Babbitt, too, went suddenly from pariah to elder statesman, and Boulez became caught up in institutional power politics and has not produced an important work since *Repons* in 1981.) Revill senses this, and his conclusion is shrewd, if a little wistful:

> Cage has lived through a time when the "avant-garde" meant what it said. As the twentieth century nears its end, there is no avant-garde of which to speak: the term has come to refer to a midcentury movement, and not to each successive advance on received artistic wisdom. Indeed, arguably times from the '80s have been recuperative rather than revolutionary.

The word "recuperative" carries a bit of stigma; and Revill hints further down the page at "a certain lack of integrity and engagement among artists." He is understandably nostalgic. A heroic time is past. But what has happened in music since the '70s cannot be dismissed as "retro," though some of it has been that. One may justifiably view the newly serious trend toward softening the boundaries between genres and roles, and toward abolishing the hierarchy of existing categories, as regenerative, whatever one may think of what has so far been brought forth. And though Cage liked to promote himself as the champion of the excluded, he upheld many traditional categories and boundaries as zealously and as rigidly as any midcentury elitist.

As his lifelong vendetta against Beethoven endlessly affirmed, Beethoven never stopped being for Cage the one to beat. Beethoven was the gatekeeper of the tradition that Cage shared with Schoenberg his teacher and with Babbitt his adversary—but perhaps no longer with us. By now Cage's values can look almost academic: anti-jazz, anti-pop (except briefly in the '60s, when rock seemed "revolutionary"), anti-improvisational (until, near the end, he figured out a way of dehumanizing improvisation). "Composing's one thing, performing's another, listening's a third," he wrote in an essay unbendingly (and oxymoronically) titled "Experimental Music: Doctrine." "What can they have to do with one another?" Composing unperformable or unlistenable works was the inevitable outcome of such an attitude, but such an outcome entailed no loss of value. In its way it was the supreme insulator, guaranteeing a sterile authenticity.

So let's hear no more about Cage the first postmodernist, or (*pace The New York Times*'s egregious obituary) about Cage the first minimalist. He was anything but. All that Cage had to say of the work of Riley, Reich or Glass (ungratefully enough, for they worshiped him) was that "I can't use it." To him, they were backsliders. Like Schoenberg, Cage was a self-appointed Hegelian protagonist on whom History made demands. He referred to his work as "what I was obliged to do." Hence, "I'm practically Germanic in my insistence on doing what is necessary." And what is necessary? "Now, obviously, the things that it is necessary to do are not the things that have been done, but the ones that have not yet been done"—which was another way of saying that he was as "devoted" as any modernist "to the principle of originality." That is maximalism, not minimalism. "Anything goes," Cage did write, sure enough, just as his enemies accused him of doing. "However, not everything is attempted.... There is endless work to be done."

II.

The superstitious category "genius" was made for the likes of Cage. Like Schoenberg (or perhaps despite Schoenberg), Cage was a primitive. And as Schoenberg said, "Talent learns from others; genius learns from itself." The mark of the genius, on the late, late Romantic terms of high modernism, was the faculty of self-validation, which gave one the magical capacity to validate others. "He has immense authority," Leo Castelli said of Cage. "He is, after all, a guru; and just the fact that he was there with his fantastic assurance was important to us all." The painter Robert Rauschenberg said that it was Cage's example that "gave me license to do anything." Morton Feldman claimed that Cage gave not just him but everybody "permission." "Permission granted," Cage liked to say in that enigmatically clarifying way of his, "but not to do whatever you want."

But who gave Cage permission? Not Schoenberg, that's for sure. Schoenberg was uniformly sarcastic and dismissive toward his American pupils, and Cage (legends to the contrary notwithstanding) was no exception. Schoenberg had given himself permission to remake the world by first putting himself through the traditional mill to the point where he had become the miller-in-chief. Cage built his own mill and never asked permission. The mill produced flour. Scary.

His really extraordinary endowment was for turning crippling limitations into special aptitudes. As Revill writes gracefully, "His ideas and practices have gradually been made adequate to, and have clarified, his inclinations." Not that he didn't have his own gurus. He fairly trumpeted them, in fact: "I didn't study music with just anybody: I studied with Schoenberg. I didn't study Zen with just anybody: I studied with Suzuki. I've always gone, insofar as I could, to the president of the company." But they did not create him. On the contrary, he created them ex post facto, from his own cloth, in the authentic tradition of modernist mythmaking.

Michael Hicks, a composer and scholar at Brigham Young University who has done the kind of skeptical research on Cage that the more devoted Revill has not attempted, has effectively demolished the legend of a special relationship between Schoenberg and Cage, or any special transmission from the one to the other. Cage never took private lessons

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from this master, he just audited some courses at USC and UCLA. He had one very discouraging interview with Schoenberg, which he romanticized in memoirs and interviews into a kind of initiation, Schoenberg agreeing to teach him gratis in return for an oath of lifelong dedication to music. Hicks has shown that free instruction from Schoenberg was more the rule than the exception (for those actually studying with him, as Cage was not), and quotes a letter from a very dissatisfied Cage that contradicts his later professions of filial adoration. Repudiating the very idea of calling himself "a Schoenberg pupil," Cage complained that "that designation is so cheap now that I am not interested in it; it is being bandied about by all those whose ears are vacant passageways for his words."

Schoenberg emerges from Cage's accounts as a kind of Zen master. ("If I followed the rules too strictly he would say, 'Why don't you take a little more liberty?' and then when I would break the rules, he'd say, 'Why do you break the rules?'") But the teacher who did the most for Cage, though no guru, was Henry Cowell. It was Cowell, not Schoenberg, who provided Cage with pertinent precedents: an interest in Asian music, an untraditional approach to the piano, a penchant for percussion. (Cowell was also Cage's first impresario, first publisher and first publicist.) The British scholar David Nicholls has tried, in characteristic mother-country fashion, to fix Cage in the context of Cowell's essentially regionalist tradition, but the effort is finally unconvincing. As Cage well recognized, Cowell's experimentation was an aspect of an overriding eclecticism that was wholly foreign to Cage. His was a vision of purity. No amount of source study or documentation can account for the astonishing lecture, "The Future of Music: Credo," that Cage delivered in Seattle in 1937. What astonishes is not so much the 25-year-old nobody's singleness of vision or his prescience, but what Castelli called his "fantastic assurance."

Cage did his best to link his work retrospectively to Schoenberg's—giving himself, as it were, Schoenberg's permission. If Schoenberg had "emancipated the dissonance" (that is, erased the distinction between consonance and dissonance in his own work, and legislated the erasure for the work of everyone else), then Cage would complete the job and emancipate noise. This, he claimed, was the foundation of his interest in percussion music, which saw him through his first important creative period (1939-43). What he really accomplished, though, was not merely the replacement of one type of sound with another on the surface of the music, but something much more fundamental. Cage's earliest percussion music (like most of the music he would write forever after, even *4'33"*) is already based on abstract durational schemes—"empty containers," as he called them, to be filled with sounds—that replaced the abstract harmonic schemes of the classical tradition.

It was a way of circumventing "the whole pitch aspect." Duration, Cage would argue, was the fundamental musical element, since all sounds—and silence, too—had it in common. And therefore, he could aver, he was the only composer who was dealing with music on its most fundamental level. (It was a claim that Elliott Carter, ignoring the scary goy, would revive in the late '40s; Cage dismissed Carter as merely "adding a new wing to the academy.") Cage contrived more imaginary precedents for his activity in the work of Webern and, of course, Satie. They, too, became totemic ancestors, two more self-created gurus through which he could give himself permission. In Webern's sparseness of texture (which he did emulate for a while), Cage heard a rejection "of sound as discourse in favor of sound as sound itself." (Webern, a fastidious serialist, would have scoffed.) "In Satie," Cage further asserted, "the structures have to do with time, not pitch." In Paris he thought he found evidence: some notebooks in which Satie had written lists of numbers similar in appearance to the proportional matrices that Cage worked out for his percussion pieces. He never could get anyone else to agree with him about those numbers (Milhaud told him they were shopping lists), but they gave him the green light.

Only in *Cheap Imitation*, which dates from 1969, does Satie finally sound the way that Cage heard him. *Cheap Imitation*, like at least half of Cage's output, was meant to accompany the dance. His four-decade career as Merce Cunningham's music director was his primary creative outlet. And it was a Seattle dancer named Syvilla Fort, who performed in a space too small to accommodate an ensemble, who mothered the invention in 1940 of the one-man percussion orchestra, a.k.a. the prepared piano, and gave Cage the medium that saw him through his second creative phase (1942-48).

The body of work that he created for this instrument is the one most likely to be recognized as a permanent contribution to the literature of music. Cage can be ranked alongside Ravel and Prokofieff as a major twentieth-century keyboard composer—though, again, anything but legit. Many of his keyboard

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compositions can be mastered by amateurs, and most of them are disarmingly "communicative." The magnum opus of the period, the cycle of *Sonatas and Interludes* of 1946-48, aspires beyond communication to the monumental representation of the nine "permanent emotions" of Hindu philosophy, but it remains Cage's most accessible large-scale composition. It is his one conspicuous concession to then-fashionable neoclassicism, otherwise his great bête noir.

The sonatas are cast, like Scarlatti's, in regular two-part forms with repeats, and proceed through infectious dance rhythms and ostinatos. The last sonata, the one toward which the whole cycle inclines, is a gorgeously static delineation of tranquillity, the emotion that balances the rest, and presages Cage's involvement with the quietism of Zen. Revill is at his best (though, as ever, vague where Cage was vague) in reporting this phase, about whose importance he is commendably skeptical. He shows that the extreme philosophical realism of Zen, its ideology of indiscriminate passive acceptance and its rejection of subjectivity were already present in Cage's thinking by the time he, the ageless auditor, began dropping in on Daisetz Suzuki's classes at Columbia sometime in the late '40s.

And all of this was contradicted in some way, even where Cage meant consciously to embody it. Accepting he may have been of nature's offerings, but he remained bitterly and bombastically rejecting of the (musical) works of (most) men. He may, as instructed, have denigrated conceptual thinking in favor of taking things as he found them, but practically to the end he remained faithful to his predetermined, idealistically rationalized durational "containers." In sum, Revill suggests, for Cage, as for many casual enthusiasts, Zen was more a personal therapy than a philosophy. It brought relief to his perilous night—his period of anguished sexual readjustment—and it enabled him to embark with renewed self-confidence on his long-presaged art of non-communication. It provided him with a handy rhetoric for advertising his new manner. But it did not give him permission.

The '50s and early '60s were Cage's heroic age—the era of the *Music of Changes*, the *Williams Mix*, the *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* (in which the percussion ensembles of yore were replaced by radios playing whatever happened to be on), the *Cartridge Music* (in which a teeming universe of "microaudial" sound was electronically explored as if in inverse answer to the exploration of space), the *Atlas Eclipticalis* (another space age extravaganza, arcanely derived from sidereal maps) and, of course, *4'33"*. It was the age of his notoriety and his guruhood.

It culminated in the grandiose *HPSCHD* (computerese for "harpsichord"), a flamboyant mixed-media performance created in collaboration with the computer engineer and composer Lejaren Hiller. Its first performance, at the University of Illinois on May 16, 1969, lasted four-and-a-half hours, and enlisted seven keyboard players, fifty-two tape recorders, fifty-two film projectors and sixty-four slide projectors. ("The following Sunday," Revill adds, pleasingly, "Apollo Ten was launched.") From the chary composer of Nothing, Cage had become the voracious composer of Everything.

HPSCHD was a response not only to baroque science, but also to '60s carnivalism, which caught Cage in its tide and, it seems, washed him out to sea. In the '70s and into the '80s he turned Dionysiac. He became a gourmandizing collagist (as in the famous Cage-supervised Deutsche Grammophon L.P. that piled *Atlas Eclipticalis* on top of *Cartridge Music* on top of the *Winter Music* for piano). He became a perpetrator of happenings, a sentimental Maoist, a nostalgic futurist, a scribbler of gibberish poetry. Worst of all, he became derivative for the first and only time, "writing through" texts by Joyce and Thoreau by turning their work mechanically into arcane acrostics and performing them amid a welter of sonic "readymades" (as Marcel Duchamp, Cage's last guru, would have called them) in three- or four-ring "musicircuses," which culminated in a series of parasitic assemblages of cultural debris whose portmanteau title, *Europera*, tells all. It is the single arguably "postmodern" facet of Cage's career, but it is glaringly the weakest, postmodern only in the most banal sense of the term.

In his last decades Cage mellowed interestingly. He turned back to fully determined (though still chance-composed) compositions in a fairly conventional notation, including some impressive virtuoso studies for instrumentalist friends (*Études Australes* for the pianist Grete Sultan, *Freeman Études* for the violinist Paul Zukofsky) and a long series of abstract solos and ensembles, the titles of which are derived from the number of performers, from one to 103. His last finished composition, which was first performed in July 1992, a month before his death at 79, was *Four*[6] (the sixth work for four), for two vocalists (one of them at the premiere the remarkably youthful Cage himself), a pianist and a percussionist. At the premiere the pianist was Leonard Stein, an old Schoenberg hand from California, whose participation brought things touchingly full-circle.

The second half of Cage's career was no match for the first, and Revill does not flinch from saying so (attributing the decline not to imaginative fatigue but to the distractions of fame). Still, there were some late gems. Two were for string quartet: *Music for Four* (1987) and *Four* (1989), both of them restrained, elegiac studies in sustained tones reminiscent of, and perhaps a tribute to, Cage's old friend Morton Feldman. When performed as plainly and devotedly as the Arditti Quartet performs them they are sublime lullabies, gloriously realizing not only the quietism of Zen as Cage professed it, but the qualities of "naive poetry" as described by Schiller: "tranquillity, purity and joy."

III.

It seems right to end this survey of Cage's output on a German romantic note. There is ultimately nothing exotic about him. His ties to the traditional aesthetic of the West that he claimed and strove to break were never broken. He is well, if latently, understood. Far more than he (or we) ever acknowledged in his lifetime, far more than he (or we) may even have known, Cage not only subscribed to the fundamental values—no, I'll be brave, to the singular bedrock tenet—of Western art, he brought it to its purest, scariest peak.

In an address that he gave in 1954, called "45' for a Speaker," Cage tried to encapsulate in two sentences his somewhat adulterated understanding of Zen (adulterated, that is, with a phrase borrowed from the Indian scholar Ananda Coomaraswamy): "The highest purpose is to have no purpose at all. This puts one in accord with nature in her manner of operation." These were the catch-phrases that he would intone and inscribe, in hundreds of permutations, for the rest of his life. Revill does an excellent job relating the notion of "purposeful purposelessness" to Cage's work, which depended equally on knowing with certainty what to do, and on having no expectation of the result.

But the phrase is just a variation (or, to put it musically, an inversion) of the "purposeless purposefulness" (*Zweckmässigkeit ohne Zweck*) by which Kant defined the brand-new concept of "the aesthetic" two centuries ago. The aesthetic, in the classical Kantian definition, was a quality of beauty wholly transcending utility. Aesthetic objects existed—that is, were made—entirely for their own sake, requiring both disinterestedness and zealous application on the part of the maker, and a corresponding act of disin-

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terested, self-abnegating contemplation on the part of the apprehender. Autonomous works of art occupied a special hallowed sphere, for which special places were set aside (museums and concert halls, "temples of art"), and where special modes of reverent behavior were observed, or, when necessary, imposed.

Music, inherently abstract to a degree owing to its lack of an obvious natural model, quickly became the Romantic art of choice, the most sacred of the autonomous arts. Not only for that reason, but because it was a performing art in which a middleman stood between maker and apprehender, music developed the most ritualized and the most hierarchical social practice, one that Cage was far from alone in crying down: "The composer was the genius, the conductor ordered everyone around and the performers were slaves." (And the listener? An innocent bystander.)

The composer's status was enhanced, and the performer's demeaned, precisely because the new concept of the autonomous artwork sharply differentiated their roles for the first time, and assigned them vastly unequal value. The composer created the perdurable aesthetic object. The performer was just an ephemeral mediator. Musical works that were too closely allied with egoistical performance values, or that too obviously catered to the needs or the whims of an audience, or even that too grossly represented the personality of the composer, were regarded as sullied because they had a *Zweck*, a purpose that compromised their autonomy. The only truly artistic purpose was that of transcending purpose.

The art that most fully met this prescription was "absolute music." And how does that differ from what Cage called "Zen"? Only in its degree of rigor. The work of the midcentury avant-garde vastly magnified and purified the Romantic notion of aesthetic autonomy, and among the midcentury avant-garde it was Cage, in his compositions of the early '50s, who reached the most astounding, self-subverting purism of all.

In that way he re-exposed in maximal terms the problematic and the contradictory aspects of the idea of absolute music. How does an artform that is inherently temporal achieve transcendent objectification? What is the ontological status of the autonomous musical work? How does the work relate to its performances? To its written score? (The question was posed most teasingly by the Polish philosopher Roman Ingarden when he asked, "Where is Chopin's B-minor Sonata?") We have seen that the essential structure, the essential "workhood," of a formalistic opus such as, say, Boulez's *Structures* can have rather little to do with its aural experience. Cage's highly determinate containers were even more arcane, because they had even less to do with the often wholly indeterminate sounds that filled them. Cage's awareness of these problems, and his sometimes playful, sometimes deadly, engagement with them, are memorably set out in his seductively Gertrude Steinish "Lecture on Nothing" of 1959, one of the essential Cage experiences, whose subject is largely the filling in of its own preplanned durational matrix ("Here we are now at the beginning of the thirteenth unit of the fourth large part of this talk ..."). It is an easy introduction to Cage's maximalized romanticism, since the sounds that fill the container are familiar words in grammatical sentences.

In the *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* for twenty-four players on twelve radios plus conductor, the concept of "the work" is more abstract and difficult. The piece has an elaborate score in fairly conventional musical notation, but there is no way of "reading" it, since the score has no determinate relationship to the sounds that will occur in performance. The intricately contrapuntal "structure" can only be realized haphazardly in performance, because what is prescribed is not a set of sounds, but a set of actions. (This in itself is far from unprecedented; ancient "tablatures" for keyboard and lute did likewise.) The players are directed to turn the knobs on the radios to specified frequencies (where there may or may not be a broadcast) and amplitudes (mainly very soft). The conductor executes all kinds of tempo changes that relate only to the "work," not to the aural experience; his elaborately choreographed actions, eliciting no discernable result, pointedly signal the abstractness and the autonomy of the work-concept. Any whiff of spoof—there is always nervous laughter at performances—is definitely an illusion. (When Virgil Thomson told Cage he didn't think a piece like that ought to be performed before a paying audience, Revill tells us, Cage took extreme umbrage and it caused a permanent rift in their relationship.) Needless to say, there is no recording.

Strangely enough, *4'33"* has been recorded several times, icon that it has become—but an icon of what? Even Cage, who loved it best of all his children and, according to Revill, treated it "reverentially," called it his "silent piece." That is a misnomer. It is, rather, a piece for a silent performer, who enters a performing space, signals the beginnings and the ends of three movements whose timings and internal "structural" subdivisions have been predetermined by chance operations, but makes no intentional sound. (Usually the signal is given by most carefully and noiselessly closing and raising the keyboard lid on a piano.) The piece consists of whatever sounds occur within a listener's earshot during these articulated spans.

This would seem to be the very antithesis of an autonomous work of art, since the sounds are wholly contingent, outside the composer's control. (Cage often maintained that his aim in composing it was to erase the boundary between art and life.) But sounds are not the only thing that a composer controls, and sounds are not the only thing that constitutes a musical work. Under the social regimen of aesthetic autonomy, the composer controls not just sounds but people, and a work is defined not just by its contents but also by the behavior that it actuates. As the philosopher Lydia Goehr, Cage's shrewdest exegete, has observed:

> It is because of [Cage's] specifications that people gather together, usually in a concert hall, to listen to the sounds of the hall for the allotted time period. In ironic gesture, it is Cage who specifies that a pianist should sit at a piano to go through the motions of performance. The performer is applauded and the composer granted recognition for the "work." Whatever changes have come about in our material understanding of musical sound, the formal constraints of the work-concept have ironically been maintained.

And she comments tactfully, in the form of a question, "Did Cage come to the compositional decisions that he did out of recognition that people will only listen to sounds around them if they are forced to do so under traditional, formal constraints?"

It is a profound political point. A work that is touted as a liberation from aesthetics in fact brings an alert philosopher to a fuller awareness of all the constraints that the category of "the aesthetic" imposes. Sounds that were noise on one side of an arbitrary framing gesture are suddenly music, a "work of art," on the other side; the aesthetic comes into being by sheer fiat, at the drop of a piano lid. The audience is invited—no, commanded—to listen to ambient or natural sounds with the same attitude of reverent contemplation they would assume if they were listening to Beethoven's Ninth.

This is an attitude that is born not of nature, but of Beethoven. By the act of triggering it, art is not brought down to earth; "life" is brought up for the duration into the empyrean. *4'33"* is thus the

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ultimate aesthetic aggrandizement, an act of transcendental empyrialism. There is nothing ironic about it, and nothing, so far as I can see, of Zen. (And *4'33"* has a published, copyrighted score. The space on its pages, measured from left to right, corresponds to the elapsing time. Most of the pages have vertical lines drawn on them, denoting the chance-calculated time articulations on which the duration of the piece depends. One of the pages, bypassed by these markers, remains blank. If copyrighting a blank page is not modernist chutzpah, I don't know what is.)

So Cage's radical conceptions were as much intensifications of traditional practices, including traditional power relations, as departures from them. His dealings with performers were especially symptomatic; here is where, if you're looking, you can find a contradiction worthy of rebuke. More than once Cage went beyond mere audience hostility and got into confrontational situations with players. Orchestral musicians in particular have taken his works as affronts. Cage and his supporters have made much of the philistinism of the players' resistance, not without some justification in the case of the members of the New York Philharmonic who stamped on the contact microphones they were asked to attach to their instruments for performances of *Atlas Eclipticalis.* (The penurious composer was forced to replace them out of pocket.)

But Cage himself has acknowledged that the social practices that have grown up around the sacralized work-object have tended to dehumanize performers, especially those who play under conductors. The only way that such musicians are able to retain a sense of personal dignity is by believing devoutly in the aesthetic of "communication" or "self-expression" (expanded to encompass a notion of collective self-expression), and this is the notion the midcentury avant-garde has worked most militantly to discredit.

Works based on a principle of non-intention present musicians with a set of especially arbitrary, hence especially demeaning, commands. They are intolerably deprived of their usual illusions of creative collaboration. The contact mikes, feeding each player's sound into a mixer that, operating on the usual chance principles, added an extra dimension of unpredictability to the proceedings, were a special outrage. As Earle Brown explained to Revill, "Even if you were making your choices with diligence, you might be turned off. Maybe you were heard, maybe you weren't." The composer, though ostensibly aiming at ego-effacement (and ostensibly opposed, as Cage put it, to "the conventional musical situation of a composer telling others what to do"), became more than ever the peremptory genius, the players more than ever the slaves.

Even soloists devoted to Cage have recognized the paradoxical reinforcement that his work has given to the old hierarchical dispensation. By the use of chance operations, Cage says, he is able to shift his "responsibility from making choices to asking questions." When the work is finished he can have the pleasure of discovering it along with the audience. The only one who cannot share the pleasure is the performer, to whom the buck is passed, who cannot evade the choices, who must supply laborious answers to the composer's diverting questions. The pianist Margaret Leng Tan, perhaps the leading exponent of Cage's music today, complained to Revill of being cut out of the fun. Her freedom in performing "chance music" is not enhanced, but diminished: "By the time you've worked out all this material, can you really give a spontaneous performance? It's a discovery for him [Cage] if he's hearing it for the first time, but it's not a discovery for me." Once again the composer's authority over the performer (and over the listener, who is reduced to a passive auditor) is paradoxically magnified. The grandiosity of genius is affirmed.

IV.

When the job description "artist" stops requiring chutzpah, postmodernism begins. At that point far-outness stops being impressive and becomes quaint. The disinterestedness of the artist and the transcendence of the artifact, maximalized under modernism, have long since metamorphosed into indifference and irrelevance. Cage's aesthetic, now that all is said and done, promoted not the integration of art and life, but rather a hypertrophied aestheticism that transgressed the normal boundaries of art and invaded life. Carrying his aesthetic credo, acceptance-of-all-things, beyond those boundaries, Cage often said that there was not too much pain in the world, that there was just the right amount. That was aestheticized politics at its most unappetizing. It was the residue of yet another outmoded romantic stereotype, the artist as public oracle, that began, as usual, with Beethoven, reached an unsavory peak in Wagner (or, from the critical perspective, in Adorno) and now, let us hope, has run its course.

The honors that John Cage reaped in his final decades, and the celebrity status that he achieved, betokened the eclipse of his relevance as an artist. His work and his persona now have a musty period flavor. It is a critical commonplace to laud his influence over other composers (and not only composers), since that is the primary measure of modernist achievement. The *New Grove Dictionary of American Music* claims flatly that Cage "has had a greater impact on world music than any other American composer of the twentieth century." Yet as one looks around at today's music world, it is hard to find evidence of that.

True, a great many composers around the world (Lutoslawski perhaps most successfully) have dabbled with "indeterminate" notation, but only as an effect, an occasional blur. Particularly in Eastern Europe, where everything was a symbol, Cage was a symbol for a while. (I knew that perestroika had got out of hand when I saw his face grinning at me from the pages of *Sovetskaya muzika,* the organ of the now defunct Union of Soviet Composers.) There are some excellent Hungarian recordings of his work (including a *4'33"* with Zoltan Kocsis dropping the lid). In Germany, where everything musical is taken much too seriously, Cage remains a cult figure. They know *E-Musik* (*ernste Musik,* "serious music") when they hear it. Few composers have ever carried less taint of the opposite category—mere *Unterhaltung* (entertainment)—than Cage. In 1992 the grandest birthday-cum-memorial festival of his music took place in Frankfurt.

Predictably, some critics have berated the American musical establishment for allowing itself to be out-Caged by Europe, but I find that pleasing. "Once in Amsterdam," Cage recalled, "a Dutch musician said to me, 'It must be very difficult for you in America to write music, for you are so far away from the centers of tradition.' I had to say, 'It must be very difficult for you in Europe to write music, for you are so close to the centers of tradition.'" He is now viewed by Europeans, and properly, as central to their tradition.

America is moving on. We are giving up the totalizing dream and are becoming engaged in a newer, truer integration of art and life. Cage, as Boulez once said of Schoenberg, is dead. Some of his work may live on. My hunch is that we will shed the lofty metaphysical Cage and incorporate the earlier dynamic and fleshly Cage—the Cage of the percussion pieces and the prepared piano—into the fringes of the repertory, insofar as their unusual media will allow. There has been a surge of interest in this music in recent years, partly, no doubt, because of the way it seems to forecast recent trends like "minimalism" and "fusion."

In any case, that music has all been

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documented in excellent recordings (most extensively by the Germans, naturally) and deserves its place in our cultural museum. My very favorite Cage piece, the *String Quartet in Four Parts* (1950), a thing of wondrous hockets and ecstatic stillness, composed right before chance took over, is in the Arditti set on Mode, which, together with Tan's piano recordings, is the best Cage to be had on records. (The hockets were even more beguiling, though, and the stillness yet more rapt, on the old New Music Quartet recording, issued by Columbia when the music was new.) Two historical items should be mentioned. The Smithsonian Institution has reissued the thirty-year-old Folkways album called *Indeterminacy*, with Cage inimitably droning through a series of marvelous one-minute anecdotes while his faithful accomplice David Tudor strums away at the random *Fontana Mix* in the background. And George Avakian is mooting the reissue of his recording of the landmark Twenty-Five-Year Retrospective Concert, held in New York's Town Hall on May 15, 1958, before an audience overwhelmingly composed of painters and gallery owners. Musicians then were not paying attention.

David Revill's biography is the first of its kind, and obviously it fills a need, even if it contributes little new information and concentrates (perhaps taking its likely audience of artists and dancers and philosophers—the traditional Cage audience—into account) on Cage's career and *mentalité*, steering pretty well clear of the music. Much of what it does contain can be gleaned from the horse's mouth in Richard Kostelanetz's indispensable mélange of interviews, *Conversing with Cage*. Revill arranges all this raw material in chronological order, and furnishes an almost complete list of works (about 200). His book is becomingly written, at times piquantly perceptive, and not entirely uncritical. (He does not hesitate to call Cage's late social philosophizing "fatuous.") An embarrassing number of names are misspelled, however, and the book is culpably unreliable on factual background, characterizing Satie's *Socrate*, for example, as a "programmatic orchestral piece," and calling Cowell's *Banshee* "the first known composition to use the sounds of the piano strings directly strummed and plucked" (it had at least two predecessors among Cowell's works).

Revill's book will be quickly superseded as fundamental research on Cage gains steam. Spadework by Michael Hicks and by Robert Stevenson gives a foretaste. The first scholarly book on the composer, by James Pritchett, has been accepted for publication by the Cambridge University Press. And more biographies are in the works, by Europeans and American alike, as well as a catalogue raisonné of sources and other impedimenta. Yes, our scary goy will get the full treatment. And why not? He was a master. Of the old school. •

The Scourge of Reason

By Moshe Halbertal

Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State by Yeshayahu Leibowitz edited by Eliezer Goldman

(Harvard University Press, 291 pp., $39.95)

In 1968, several months after the Six-Day War, while Israeli society was still in a state of relief and euphoria, Yeshayahu Leibowitz made this alarming prediction:

> Our real problem is not the territory but rather the population of about a million and a half Arabs who live in it and over whom we must rule. Inclusion of these Arabs ... in the area under our rule will effect the liquidation of the state of Israel as the state of the Jewish people and bring about a catastrophe for the Jewish people as a whole; it will undermine the social structure that we have created in the state and cause the corruption of individuals, both Jew and Arab.... Its situation would be much like that of the state of Lebanon, perplexed as it is with the relations between Maronite Christians, Muslims and Druzes.... The only concern of the monstrosity called "The Undivided Land of Israel" would be the maintenance of its system of rule and administration.... Out of concern for the Jewish people and its state we have no choice but to withdraw from the territories and their population of one and a half million Arabs; this action to be done without any connection with the problem of peace.

This argument, of course, lies now at the center of the contemporary Israeli debate, but in 1968 he was a lonely voice. Leibowitz's dovish politics is not an expression of optimism, or of a sanguine assessment of the possibility of reconciliation between the Arab world and Israel. It is not based on any prettifying view of the intentions of the Arab world toward Israel, which he has always suspected. What drives him, rather, is a concern for the future of Israel and its nature as a Jewish democratic state. Leibowitz has always tried to break the conceptual and political linkage, that platitude of "the peace process," known as "territories for peace": he is skeptical about peace, but he is convinced that withdrawal from the territories is a vital necessity for Israel.

Leibowitz has been blessed with a gift for detached and unsentimental analysis, and the coldness of his reason annoys many of his adversaries. Whether one agrees or disagrees with his views, there can be no doubt that he has produced the strictest and the most significant criticism of Israel that Israel has ever been handed by one of its own citizens. He has a rare moral presence. He is relentless and provocative—a man of truth.

Leibowitz's criticism of his own society is not exercised only by Israeli-Arab relations. He addresses also, and at greater length, the central questions of modern Jewish identity, especially those that arise from the establishment of the Jewish state. With great clarity he treats matters such as the religious crisis of the Jews since the emancipation, the meaning of Zionism and the relation between religion and state in Israel. Leibowitz is an Orthodox Jew for whom the state is a thoroughly secular institution. The state, in his view, is the necessary and the profane instrument of what he believes to be the sole aim of Zionism: the liberation of the Jews from the control of foreign powers. Nothing less, but nothing more.

What makes his insistence on the secular character of the state so interesting is that it is based on religious considerations. David Ben-Gurion, who differed with Leibowitz on first principles, grasped the religious motivations of the philosopher's call for the total separation of religion and state. In a conversation during the 1950s Ben-Gurion told him:

> I well understand why you demand so insistently the separation of religion and state. Your object is that the Jewish religion reinstate itself as an independent factor, so that the political authority will be compelled to deal with it. I will never agree to the separation of religion from the state. I want the state to hold religion in the palm of its hand.

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The religious leadership funded and appointed by the state was accused by Leibowitz of betraying the traditional role of the prophets and the sages who always maintained their independence from the state. Instead of becoming a vehicle for the religious criticism of politics, the religious parties became a rubber stamp for politics, corrupting both religion and the state. In his characteristically forceful manner, Leibowitz described the blend of religion and state in these terms: "The status of the Jewish religion in the state of Israel is that of a kept mistress of the secular government—therefore it is contemptible."

Leibowitz combines a broad European-Jewish education, the asceticism of a Zionist pioneer and the zeal of a deeply God-fearing and God-obeying person. He was born in Riga in 1903, and educated at home and in the University of Berlin. In 1924 he took a doctorate in chemistry, and went on to study medicine in Köln and Heidelberg. After the Nazis came to power he fled to Switzerland, where he completed a medical degree in Basel, and in 1934 he settled in Palestine, where he began to teach chemistry at the young Hebrew University. He was recognized as a brilliant teacher, and the variety of subjects about which he lectured was evidence of the breadth of his interests: the history of science; the philosophy of mind; a weekly class, broadcast by radio, on the Torah; Maimonides' *The Guide of the Perplexed*; music and literature; and so on. And the magnitude of his mind did not impede its public engagement. The indefatigable controversialist still seems to be speaking and provoking everywhere, in remote kibbutzim and development towns, in high schools and military bases and pensioners clubs. If Jerusalem is a polis, then Leibowitz is its Socrates.

Leibowitz provokes storms like no other intellectual in Israel. Last month a committee recommended that Leibowitz be awarded the immensely prestigious Israel Prize, and furious public controversy broke out immediately. The Israeli right in particular was incensed, and the 90-year-old philosopher poured fuel on their flames with an outrageous comparison between Israeli undercover military units in the territories and the fundamentalist terrorist groups of Hamas. The Israeli government denounced Leibowitz's statements, and the prime minister threatened to boycott the ceremonies. At which point Leibowitz announced that he was giving up the prize. It was an ugly business, and also a little ridiculous. (Why should a philosopher require the blessing of a prime minister?) Still, the spectacle of the Rabin Cabinet, beleaguered by acute diplomatic, political and economic problems, devoting one of its sessions to a consideration of Leibowitz's statements was fine proof that the philosopher has touched a deep popular nerve.

It is a mistake, however, to be guided in one's measure of Leibowitz's achievement solely by the din of his controversies. Leibowitz's moral pathos is not the product only of humanistic convictions. He is not merely a social critic. His main and lasting contribution is one of the most innovative and powerful interpretations of Judaism of the last decades. Although Leibowitz never produced a systematic book on Judaism, a careful reading of this collection of essays (and its excellent introduction by Eliezer Goldman) will reveal a systematic working out of the main aspects of Judaism.

For Leibowitz, the most fundamental principle of Judaism is the rejection of idolatry. But he redefines the meaning of idolatry, and so infuses the ancient iconoclasm with new energy. The strange god against which the Bible warns, according to Leibowitz, is not a competing metaphysical being, but more generally any value or institution, human or natural, that is invested with the status of the absolute. The only thing that is sacred, he insists strictly, is God; and the full implication of this statement is that the human and natural world—including politics, aesthetics and morality—is drained of any claim to the absolute. It is hard to imagine a monotheist more radical than Leibowitz.

Idol worship, moreover, is not narrowly defined as the ritual acts of a cult, but more expansively as devotion and submission to the human and the natural. Leibowitz's war against idolatry extends to what seem to be "legitimate" religious concerns and rituals, too. Thus he denounces as idolatrous a traditional assertion regarding the essential sacredness of the land and the people of Israel. Since nothing human is sacred, religion, which is the sphere of the sacred, cannot serve any human interest. The worship of God is the exclusive purpose of the commandments of the Torah, and any other purpose, however morally or socially noble, even the purpose of the survival of the Jewish people, is an instrumentalization of religion, and forbidden.

Leibowitz's iconoclastic fury is directed at modern Jewish ideologies that amounted to precisely such instrumental interpretations of the significance of Judaism: Herman Cohen's and the Reform movement's reduction of Judaism to a moral system, and the notion of some secular Zionist thinkers that the significance of Judaism stems from its ability to preserve the Jewish people through centuries of persecution. Both of these interpretations press religion into the service of human values and desires, and so they are idolatrous in their essence. Invested with the aura of religion, morality and nationalism become a fetish.

From the point of view of human reason, then, the commandments are totally arbitrary; their meaning is dependent upon an act of will that perceives them as pure action done for the sake of worshiping God. The meaninglessness of the Torah from the point of view of human values includes not only the morally neutral commandments (such as the prohibitions against eating non-kosher food) but also the moral commandments themselves. According to Leibowitz, the commandment "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" derives its religious significance from the end of the same verse: "I am God." Ethics is not self-impelled; it, too, is motivated by obedience to the Divine will. The biblical figures that embody this stand of faith are Abraham, in his willingness to sacrifice his son and his moral conviction for the sake of fulfilling God's will, and Job, in his heroic loyalty to God even when he was deprived of any reward for his piety. For Leibowitz, the true life of faith transcends any human need. It is a matter of defiance, not of comfort.

According to Leibowitz, the ideal of God's worship is fulfilled in practice, namely, in the fulfillment of the commandments of the Torah. Doctrines and articles of faith are not the point. Judaism never developed an official theology, and the few unsuccessful attempts to formulate a body of Jewish dogma only settle the matter. Historically, the Jewish tradition tolerated a diversity of beliefs about God; there were the rationalist conceptions of Maimonideans and the mystical conceptions of the Kabbalists. What made this diverse community of believers into a single religion, however, was the observance by all its members, rationalists and mystics alike, of the commandments. It was shared religious action, not shared religious belief, that gave Judaism its identity through time. (Early Christianity became a faith outside of Judaism not because of its belief in Jesus as the Messiah, or its Trinitarian conception of the divine, but because of

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the Paulinian rejection of the law.)

Of course, the idea that Judaism is mainly a religion of the law was taken by its opponents as its main weakness. Christian critics of Judaism condemned it as legalistic and void of spirit; and the Jewish God was described as a distant legislator and a God of fear. This outlook shaped the Church's position toward Judaism, and it became widespread also among some of the great European philosophers, such as Spinoza, Kant and Hegel. Leibowitz's attitude to this time-honored criticism of his faith is defiant: unlike other modern Jewish theologians, Martin Buber most notably, who shied away from the halakah, or Jewish law, in their representation of Judaism and preferred to install a spiritualized emotion at its core, Leibowitz brazenly embraces the law as the defining characteristic of Judaism.

Leibowitz turns Paul's indictment on its head. What was portrayed as routine and empty, he portrays as sublime and heroic. Christianity offers redemption to man, but Judaism offers man only the demand that he live in the service of God. Leibowitz opposes the binding of Isaac to the crucifixion of Jesus, and in that contrast of symbols he finds the essential contradiction. In the former, a man was willing to sacrifice his own son for the service of God; in the latter, God sacrificed his own son for the salvation of man. For Leibowitz, then, Judaism and Christianity are diametrically opposed, and that famous thing known as "the Judeo-Christian tradition" is an illusion. A dialogue between these beliefs is unimaginable, though coexistence between the believers is imperative.

Leibowitz is correct in asserting that loyalty to the halakah is both a necessary and a sufficient condition for membership in the Jewish religion. Still, his interpretation is sometimes too simple or too shrill. An examination of the halakah itself reveals an extensive interest in human needs and values. Talmudic and post-talmudic legal literature shows the vast impact of human values and needs on the shaping of the law: from fairness and justice in torts and property law to the detailed structuring of marital relationships in family law. Talmudic deliberation is hardly the inhuman ratiocination of its Christian and post-Christian caricatures; it is replete with references to real human values and weaknesses, which it incorporates into its legal reasonings. Leibowitz errs in the strictness of his insistence on the transcendence of the halakah above human values and needs. He is too strict. He allows for only the narrow and the technical dimensions of legal reasoning in the shaping of the halakah. In fact, the reasonings in Judaism's hundreds of years of halakhic deliberation are much broader and richer than Leibowitz's one-dimensional if heroic promotion of practice and obedience.

The importance of action as a form of religious expression in Leibowitz's thought is also connected to his positivist epistemology. For the only factual statements recognized by Leibowitz are scientific propositions about the world, since they can be verified or falsified. Metaphysical statements, by contrast, are empty and meaningless. Thus faith, in Leibowitz's account, is not a cognitive state of mind that approves of metaphysical principles such as God's existence or the doctrine of the creation of the world; it is essentially non-cognitive. Religion is normative, not informative; it does not provide knowledge about the world.

This refusal to ground religious belief in propositions of fact does not make Leibowitz an atheist, or even an agnostic. In the tradition of the "negative theology" of Maimonides and other rationalists, which rejects the possibility of any positive linguistic articulation of knowledge about God, Leibowitz claims that the only possible gesture of faith is the actual fulfillment of God's commandments. The cognitive belief in God is not a precondition for the worship of God, it is entailed by the worship itself. Thus the clash between science and religion, according to Leibowitz, is rooted in a deep categorical mistake. Wittgenstein, another believer, ended his reflections on the limits of metaphysical knowledge with his famous statement that "whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent." Leibowitz's view might be said to be, "Whereof one cannot speak thereof one must act."

For all its difficulties, however, Leibowitz's picture of Judaism is learned and philosophically sophisticated, and it presents a thoroughly non-apologetic view of Judaism that finds its meaning in the life of its law. The powerful principles of his theology provide the basis for the powerful arguments of his social criticism. Leibowitz's extreme conviction that nothing human deserves complete human loyalty, since nothing human is sacred, lies at the heart of his intellectual and political engagement. He makes his criticisms of his society as a man standing before God. Isaiah Berlin is right to call him "the conscience of Israel." It is the deep and rather beautiful paradox of Leibowitz's life and

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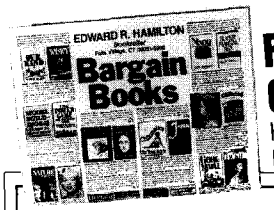

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thought that a thinker who attempted to purify religion of the human is one of the most human voices of his generation, that this great denier of the moral character of religion is one of the great moralists of his people.

MOSHE HALBERTAL is the author, with Avishai Margalit, of *Idolatry* (Harvard University Press).

Sentimental Wounds

BY CRAIG SELIGMAN

The English Patient by Michael Ondaatje

(Knopf, 308 pp., $21)

Michael Ondaatje's reputation has been widening, incrementally but steadily, since he first began writing poems thirty years ago. With the publication of *The English Patient* he has stepped confidently into the bright hot light of the world stage. The novel has been acclaimed and awarded, and you only have to read a few of its beautiful opening pages to see why: its quiet prose, its strange, troubling story, its obscure dilations and tangents are so hypnotic that a reader can float to the end on a cloud of words without ever noticing the confusion that's boiling underneath. Ondaatje goes after his subject with his poet's flair for startling images. But what rings like a bell within the confines of a poem may not carry so far in the wide-open landscape of the novel. Ondaatje's characters are *all* image. Try to take hold of them and they slip through your fingers like sand.

Born in Sri Lanka when it was still Ceylon—"a pendant off the ear of India," he called it once—Ondaatje followed his mother, who had left his alcoholic father, to England when he was 11. He arrived in Canada in 1962, when he was 19, and it was there, where he has remained, that he became a writer. The amiable literary scene gave him a sense of security, and the obscurity of the small presses was a boon to a young artist shoring up his self-assurance.

He slid happily into a Canadian skin. You would never have known he was the product of a British education. For his first decade he wrote mainly verse, and the diction he evolved was casual, colloquial and sly—never pompous or formal. His subject matter wasn't very British either. *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, which appeared in 1970, was his first novel, or "novel"—"pastiche" and "dramatic poem" have also been used to describe this evocative but rather attenuated sequence of poems, prose poems, concocted interviews, reminiscences and photographs. *Coming through Slaughter* (1976), his next one, explores—with less verse than *Billy the Kid* but many of the same techniques—the sad career of Buddy Bolden, the New Orleans cornetist who died in 1931 after twenty-four wordless years in a hospital for the insane.

Ondaatje had written poems about his Ceylonese past, but not until 1982, with his eccentric memoir *Running in the Family*, did he treat his colonial background at length. *Running in the Family* was the breakthrough, the book in which he metamorphosed from collage artist to storyteller, and it is his best work. For the first time he paid real attention to the rise and resolution, the buildup and follow-through, of narrative. He included poems in the mix, but only as interludes to the story of his grandmother's life and death, his parents' marriage and divorce and his father's dissolution. Ondaatje had been a meticulous editor of his verse collections, with a keen ear for structural rhythms, and his experience paid off superbly in shaping the memoir. *Running in the Family* begins dottily and gradually deepens, darkens and slows. The anecdotes are fleshed out; the high jinks and shenanigans of family legend give way to the real confusions of sad, bewildered and much loved people.

Running in the Family formed a turning point in another respect, too. In his earlier work, Ondaatje sought—and achieved, with what seems like amazing ease—a recognizably North American voice. In the memoir he embraced his Ceylonese heritage. His next prose work, *In the Skin of a Lion*, deals directly with the experience of outsiders in Canada (though not his experience): the immigrant labor force—Macedonians, Greeks and Italians—that constructed industrial Toronto.

In *The English Patient* the major characters are outsiders, too: two Canadians, an Englishman-cum-Hungarian and a Sikh in Italy in 1945, at the end of the Second World War. In a villa twenty miles outside Florence, a young nurse tends an English flyer burned beyond recognition. The villa has served until recently as a hospital. Now the staff has departed, but these two, who have formed an odd symbiosis, have refused to leave. In time they are joined by a Canadian-Italian thief, who has come to find the woman, and a Sikh sapper, one of the Allied troops whose task it is to scout the countryside dismantling the live mines the Germans have planted on their retreat.

The nurse, Hana, and the thief, Caravaggio, are carry-overs from *In the Skin of a Lion*. But the characters as conceived for that novel don't quite fit the purposes of *The English Patient*. In the earlier book, the young Hana—9 when we first meet her, in 1931—is the daughter of a woman whom the hero, Patrick Lewis, falls in love with; at the end, when she's 16, she is left in his care. We learn of Patrick's death early on in *The English Patient*: Ondaatje wants a heroine grieving for a lost father so that he can connect her grief with her ministrations to the burned flyer. And at the end we learn that he died by fire, thus making the connection explicit.

But those who have read *In the Skin of a Lion* and know that Patrick is not Hana's real father may find the depth of her grief—she is virtually catatonic—bewildering. (And they may find the passages implying a blood relation disingenuous.) Moreover, the chronology of *In the Skin of a Lion* makes it unlikely that Hana could have known Caravaggio, a friend Patrick meets in prison, before the age of 16, but *The English Patient* dates their relationship much earlier.

Obviously Ondaatje has decided to ignore the inconsistencies, or rather to smooth them out by fiat. But the task requires such a powerful fiat that you end up wondering why he bothered to use the same characters at all. Besides, the carry-over might not have been a good idea even if the chronology had worked out perfectly. The hectic universe of *In the Skin of a Lion* lies a million miles from the hushed, reflective surroundings of *The English Patient*. And so letting even minor characters immigrate between the novels is jarring—as though Polonius were to dodder onstage and find himself in Dunsinane.

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Still, it would be reasonable to argue, that is a small distraction from the beauty that through much of *The English Patient* is almost overwhelming. This chaste, metaphorical prose, with its undercurrent of remorse and despair and terrible pain, could disguise far bigger holes in the fabric (and sometimes it does). The flash and the nonchalance of Ondaatje's youthful writing have given way to an exquisite restraint:

> Every four days she washes his black body, beginning at the destroyed feet. She wets a washcloth and holding it above his ankles squeezes the water onto him, looking up as he murmurs, seeing his smile. Above the shins the burns are worst. Beyond purple. Bone.
>
> She has nursed him for months and she knows the body well, the penis sleeping like a sea horse, the thin tight hips. Hipbones of Christ, she thinks. He is her despairing saint. He lies flat on his back, no pillow, looking up at the foliage painted onto the ceiling, its canopy of branches, and above that, blue sky.
>
> . . . . .
>
> A man with no face. An ebony pool. All identification consumed in a fire. Parts of his burned body and face had been sprayed with tannic acid, that hardened into a protective shell over his raw skin. The area around his eyes was coated with a thick layer of gentian violet. There was nothing to recognize in him.

Passages like this, imagined as carefully as they are written, are a triumph of simplicity—for a while. After a couple of hundred pages, simplicity verges on monotony. As a poet Ondaatje specializes in the shocking image, the exhilarating grotesquerie; but what's peculiar about *The English Patient*, given how full of wounds it is, is the way the ugliness is played down. Those descriptions of the burned flyer are serene, almost lovely, with no emphasis on pain and no hint that he's difficult to look at. His burns transfigure him; they seem to be primarily spiritual. John Donne could have administered them.

The thief has been wounded, too. (Ondaatje's great-uncle was a thief; he gets mentioned, briefly, in *Running in the Family*.) He is a problematic character anyway, not only here but also in the previous novel. Just naming him Caravaggio, and thus linking him to the exuberant scoundrel artist, is problem enough. Ondaatje even lilts about "the art of robbery." Caravaggio never causes the author any moral qualms; Ondaatje seems content to let him steal from the rich (or, in *The English Patient*, from the unseen and the unwritten about) and leave it at that. By treating his burglar so whimsically, he moves the realm of the action from novel to fable—which, as an aesthetic decision, may be a defensible tack. But it makes a confusing overlay to a novel that presents itself as a psychological chamber piece. Are the characters supposed to represent individuals, or are they abstractions? Ideally, of course, they could be both; as it is, now they're one, now the other. This tension, which pulls at the narrative again and again, finally ends up ripping it down the seams.

The wounds that Caravaggio has suffered are to his hands: he has had his thumbs sliced off by the Germans. (Caravaggio the painter was disfigured, too, but his wounds were to his face.) It is a poetic fate for a thief, and a resonant one for Ondaatje, who has always been intrigued by manual dexterity (witness Billy the Kid's and Buddy Bolden's constant finger exercises). What is most surprising about Caravaggio's wounds, though, is how little use Ondaatje makes of them physically: he doesn't press them any harder than he does the English patient's burns. He sets forth the paradox of the thief who can't grasp, but he never shows us (in a novel full of ostentatious research) how a thumbless person maneuvers. We see Caravaggio lose his balance and knock something over; we see him humiliated and depressed about his condition and hear him lament that he's lost his nerve. For the most part, though, his looting continues unaffected.

It is an arresting, romantic notion. The trouble is that images that will bear plenty of weight in a poem sit differently in the psychological terrain of a novel, where they have to be *given* weight. Otherwise they float up free of the world. Ondaatje's poems, for all their unexpected figures, are thoroughly rooted in the world. His difficult verse constantly invokes the chaos of experience; in fact, it tries to simulate it (which is the primary reason it's difficult). He is fond of offering his opinion (as he does in *The English Patient*) that "there is no order in the world." But there is, or there must be, order in art. The narrator of *In the Skin of a Lion* observes, "The first sentence of every novel should be: 'Trust me, this will take time but there is order here, very faint, very human.'" Ondaatje's creed as a poet seems to be to impose just enough order on the confusion around him to get it down on paper without wrenching it into a fake symmetry—"not clarity but the sense of shift."

As a novelist, though, he is more conventional, especially in his later books. He simplifies; his characters do what they do out of motives that can be explicated. (Hana devotes herself to her burned flyer because her father died of burns.) And he likes big, theatrical behavior. Nothing mundane or domestic ties his characters down; they're ready as soon as the temptation or the crisis comes along to abandon their lives and stride away. One day Buddy Bolden meets a woman at an out-of-town gig, and that's the last that his wife and children hear of him for years. The millionaire Ambrose Small of *In the Skin of a Lion* just picks up and disappears; his family has no idea where he's gone and never sees him again.

The characters who don't have the resources to disappear from the scene disappear into themselves. Patrick Lewis reduces his life "almost to nothing" when his first love leaves him. Hana's wartime trials turn her into something close to a zombie. Ondaatje loves, or fears, the notion of silence—anyway, he keeps coming back to it. In a poem called "White Dwarfs" he asks:

> Why do I love most
> among my heroes those
> who sail to that perfect edge
> where there is no social fuel

And he relates this terrible item:

> The Gurkhas in Malaya
> cut the tongues of mules
> so they were silent beasts of burden
> in enemy territories
> after such cruelty what could they speak of
> anyway

But again, what has symbolic resonance in a poem can look melodramatic in a novel. Even pushed to his limit, it

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We all know that, by dint of constant repitition, white can be made to appear black, good can get transformed into evil, and myth may take the place of reality. Israel, with roughly one-thousandth of the world's population and with a similar fraction of the territory of this planet, seems to engage the totally disproportionate attention of the print and broadcast media. Unfortunately, much of what the media tell us—in reporting, editorializing, and in analysis—are endlessly repeated myths.

What are the facts?

Myth: The "Palestinians" are a nation and therefore deserving of a homeland.
Reality: The concept of Palestinian nationhood is a new one and had not been heard of until after the Six-Day War, when Israel, by its victory, came into the administration of the territories of Judea and Samaria (the "West Bank") and the Gaza strip. The so-called "Palestinians" are no more different from the Arabs in the neighboring countries of Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan, than Wisconsinites are from Iowans.
Myth: Judea and Samaria (the "West Bank"), and the Gaza Strip are "occupied Arab territory."
Reality: All of "Palestine"—east and west of the Jordan River—was part of the League of Nations mandate. Under the Balfour Declaration all of it was to be the "national home for the Jewish people." In violation of this mandate, Great Britain severed the entire area east of the Jordan—about 75% of Palestine, and gave it to the Arabs, who created on it the kingdom of Transjordan. When Israel declared its independence in 1948, four Arab armies invaded the new country in order to destroy it at its very birth. They were defeated by the Israelis. The Transjordanians, however, remained in occupation of Judea and Samaria (the "West Bank") and East Jerusalem. They proceeded to drive all Jews from those territories and to systematically destroy all Jewish houses of worship and other institutions. The Transjordanians, now renamed 'Jordanians" were the occupiers. Israel regained these territories following its victory in the Six-Day War and has administered them ever since. They have not been annexed. Their final status will be decided if and when peace with the Arabs is finally attained.
Myth: Jewish settlements in Judea and Samaria (the "West Bank") are the "greatest obstacle to peace."
Reality: This is a totally new formulation, which was put forward by James Baker, our former Secretary of State. He and former President Bush seemed obsessed by it. Fewer than 100,000 Jews are settled in these territories, living among about 1.4 million Arabs. How can Jews living there be an obstacle to peace? Why *shouldn't* they live there? About 700,000 Arabs live in Israel proper. They are not an obstacle to peace and nobody (including the Israelis), consider them as such.
Myth: Israel is unwilling to yield "land for peace."
Reality: The concept that to the loser, rather than to the victor, belong the spoils is a radically new one, never before thought of in world history. Israel has emerged victorious in the five wars imposed on it by the Arabs. In order to make peace, it has returned over 90% of the territory occupied by it, specifically the vast Sinai Peninsula, to Egypt. That territory contained some of the most advanced military installations in the world, prosperous cities and settlements, and oil fields developed entirely by Israel that made it independent of petroleum imports. In the Camp David Accords (1978), Israel agreed to autonomy for Judea and Samaria (the "West Bank"), with the permanent status to be determined after three years. But, until today, it has been "all or nothing" for the Arabs, and they have been unwilling to consider or to discuss autonomy.

The greatest myth of all is that Israel's administration of the Gaza Strip and of Judea/Samaria is the root cause of the conflict between Arabs and Jews. But that is nonsense and flies in the face of historical reality. The Arab desire to obliterate the Jewish presence in Palestine, and since 1948 the Jewish state, long predates that territorial administration. The root cause of the conflict is the total unwillingness of the Arabs to tolerate any "non-believers" to be in control of even one inch of what they consider "sacred Arab soil." And they don't just mean Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") and the Gaza strip. They mean Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, the whole state of Israel. No change in the Arabs' attitude seems to be in the offing. But until there is such a change, no peace can possibly come to this troubled area.

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doesn't sound like the resilient (and garrulous) Caravaggio to spend four months, after his ordeal of torture, without uttering a word. But Ondaatje's characters don't take halfway measures. Flight, withdrawal, homicide, suicide—none of them ever considers adjusting to a situation.

This is life as it's lived on the big screen, not on earth. Real life is pettier, sillier, messier—a circumstance that Ondaatje has no trouble acknowledging in his memoir, which is full of the sadness and foolishness of people, or in his poems about his own untidy marriages ("I am writing this with a pen my wife has used / to write a letter to her first husband"). But even in his verse love has a tendency to take on a more theatrical aspect:

> I don't know
> if this is drowning
> or coming up for air
>
> At night
> I give you my hand
> like a corpse
> out of the water

That's more like the love that wracks Buddy Bolden and Patrick Lewis and Count Ladislaus de Almásy—which is the name of the burned Hungarian explorer and Axis agent (a historical figure, significant in the desert expeditions of the 1930s) whom Hana has taken, at his word, for an English patient.

Almásy claims amnesia, but drawn out by morphine, alcohol and the persistence of Caravaggio (who, with verisimilitude-shattering convenience, turns out to have just the information to penetrate his cover), in time he relates the tragic history of his affair with Katharine Clifton, the (beautiful, imperious) wife of a young English flyer. Artistically his story is about on a level with *Casablanca*—indiscretion, remorse, nobility and the North African heat—or it would be if it had a studio to scuff it up some. It desperately needs to come down to earth. Ondaatje's intent is to place a romance against history; but his brand of passion is so much bigger than life that history winds up, as it did in the last novel, getting placed against the romance. Hence the central metaphor: *"the heart is an organ of fire,"* Almásy scribbles in his journal. *"A love story . . . is a consuming of oneself and the past."* In other words, no wonder he's been burned to a crisp.

Ondaatje has done hours and hours of homework on the exploration of the Egyptian-Libyan desert, on British bomb-defusion techniques, on the Canadian nursing corps and the Indian

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military in Europe. It is showy but not insistent; he loves information, but he is careful not to let it throw the narrative out of whack. There's still a problem, though, which is that the research novel is a territory that has already been staked out by a master. It isn't only the technique that is familiar, either. When Almásy reflects gloomily that "there was just trade and power, money and war. Financial and military despots shaped the world," *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow* light up in the background like Christmas trees. Ondaatje's cool pastels, for all their fineness, pale next to Pynchon's psychedelic palette. His poet's sense of structure leans toward beauty rather than excitement; vulgarity isn't one of his vices, and so it isn't one of his virtues, either.

And beyond the blandness and the psychological thinness, there's also a serious political confusion. Ondaatje's Waterloo comes in the character of Kirpal Singh, or Kip, the mine defuser who becomes Hana's lover. Kip has the most convincing personality of the four, and yet he too has been conceived in the abstract, which becomes clear at the end, when (completely out of character) he goes to pieces at the news of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. From the beginning Ondaatje has made him a sucker for Western culture: he goes around humming the hit parade (it's given to him to announce the death of Glenn Miller); he craves English tea; and he loves the art of the Church, having made his way up through Italy marveling at the frescoes and the sculptures, which Ondaatje spends a lot of pleasant time describing. But when the bomb—"this tremor of Western wisdom"—drops on Japan, he freaks out. He turns on his companions in the villa and, seeing "the new revealed enemy" before him, he suddenly swells up and becomes a new character—Asia:

> My brother told me. Never turn your back on Europe. The deal makers. The contract makers. The map drawers. Never trust Europeans, he said.... American, French, I don't care. When you start bombing the brown races of the world, you're an Englishman. You had King Leopold of Belgium and now you have fucking Harry Truman of the USA. You all learned it from the English.

He throws himself onto his motorbike and careens away, as hysterically disillusioned as Lana Turner howling at the wheel in *The Bad and the Beautiful*.

Caravaggio agrees: "They would never have dropped such a bomb on a white nation"; and no doubt he's right. But it's not that simple either. Ondaatje, who in the past has been accused of disloyalty to his Third World origins (even though *Running in the Family* is stoutly anti-imperialist), here proudly allies himself with the Asians. But you only have to read him to recognize that whatever his racial mix, he is as Western as Billy the Kid. And though there's no dismissing the elements of racism in the bombing, only a sentimentalist would feel comfortable lumping Japan with "the brown races" of the Third World. The Japanese are about as deprived as the English, and they have committed their full portion of atrocities. For that matter, the subcontinent has not bred a nation of Gandhis either.

The destruction of Hiroshima doesn't implicate us as Westerners—it implicates us as human beings, and humanity is a condition that afflicts Asians and Africans, too. At the finale Ondaatje uses history to justify an act of personal cruelty—a snit. Kip, the Sikh "warrior saint" who never considers himself, never thinks of his own safety, who is "never interested in the choreography of power," runs out on his loved ones the same way Buddy Bolden and Ambrose Small do, the same way Ondaatje's alcoholic father used to do. It is the act not of a moral hero but of a moral adolescent.

But morality plays a funny role in *The English Patient*. The book is clearly intended to be anti-war, but what does that mean? Almásy relates the story of his upstanding colleague Madox, who at the start of the war left the desert to return to England, and in a village church, appalled by a monstrously jingoistic sermon, took out his pistol and put a bullet through his heart: "Madox was a man who died because of nations." Nations are the villain; Ondaatje wants to remind us that we are all linked by a common humanity (though that doesn't stop him from hurling accusatory generalizations when Kip is railing against the West).

He has a low opinion of politics. This novel and the last one are stewed in history, but his heroes are essentially apolitical. Or rather, their politics are extensions of their love affairs. Patrick Lewis turns into a revolutionary, after Hana's mother dies, because she was a revolutionary; it's a sentimental commitment, not a political one. Almásy sides with the Germans because the British army fails to rescue the injured Katharine Clifton. Geoffrey Clifton, an important English operative, forgets or forsakes his duty and kills himself in a fit of sexual despair. No one thinks about a higher responsibility—their emotions are the higher responsibility.

After eliciting his full confession, Caravaggio finally decides that it doesn't matter which side Almásy was on. (The middle-aged men in this novel bear the burden of tragic knowledge. Ondaatje is 49.) Ondaatje *wants* it not to matter, which must be the reason he keeps the fascists offstage. We witness (in flashback) a single Nazi atrocity—the amputation of Caravaggio's thumbs—which is more than balanced, at the end, by the Allies' act of atomic destruction. His morals may be elevated, but his politics are thin as paper. Is he saying it all evens out? Tell it to the Jews and the Gypsies and the homosexuals. Is he saying that war is hideous? Oh. Or is he making grand gestures? Ondaatje hasn't written a novel at all, he has written a storybook, and his characters are storybook characters. That is the beauty of *The English Patient*, and that is where it fails.

CRAIG SELIGMAN has written about books and movies for *The Threepenny Review*, *The Village Voice* and *The Modern Review*.

A Glimpse of Simon Verity

The master mason perches on the scaffolding,
wool cap askew and stone dust in his hair,
his wiry torso bare,
chisel and mallet chipping at a figure
not fully formed, emerging from the stone.
A mauve October twilight, greenhouse-warm,
holds us. The hospital where you were born
is a mere stone's throw (limestone chip) away.
You have just fallen up a flight of stairs
and grazed your knee, but now you dry your tears
and watch the face the mason's hands awaken.

RACHEL HADAS

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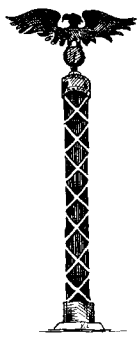
WASHINGTON DIARIST

Off the charts

"IF ONLY PEOPLE WERE AS WORried about getting into the kingdom of heaven," a minister in Washington sighed one evening to his wife, the director of admissions at a very prestigious private school. They'd just been to yet another party at which she'd been mobbed and he'd been ignored. Getting your kid into a heavenly kindergarten is by now well established as a punishing ordeal in the capital and elsewhere. (On its emergence more than a decade ago, see "The Kindergarten Rat Race" by Barbara Demick, TNR, September 29, 1979.) So I was grim as I headed off a couple of months ago to an introductory seminar on the subject held at my neighborhood nursery school (where I heard the story about the minister, from his wife). To my surprise, I came home from the meeting feeling very cheerful. I expected that I'd soon be moaning and groaning, after the round of public and private school tours, interviews, tests, etc. had begun. But now all that's over, and I'm still feeling like the nerd who actually likes school.

IN FACT, I SEEM NEXT TO IMPOSSIble not to please. The public school system that Bill and Hillary Clinton rejected? It sounds just fine, at least for younger kids. The teachers who showed up at the meeting from the two neighborhood D.C. elementary schools gave a very upbeat spiel. To help offset draconian budget cuts, they've got parents pitching in with time and money; classrooms are well equipped, and kindergarten goes until 3 o'clock (while classes in adjacent, richer Montgomery County kindergartens have been gutted to half a day). A visit to one of the schools convinced me that the teachers hadn't been indulging in hype at all. And what about brutally competitive private schools? They beckon as a mellow alternative. Their teachers sounded laid-back, full of talk about family atmosphere. They didn't know (or at least they claimed not to remember) the statistic that parents fear most: the ratio of applications to admissions. Later on I caught the head of an especially exclusive lower school being even more cavalier about meritocratic hurdles: the school's elaborate screening process for 3- and 4-year-olds, he admitted, might not be any better than random selection.

SO WHAT ABOUT BRUTALLY COMpetitive parents? I've now had a chance to watch myself and my counterparts in the setting most likely to elicit the worst behavior: an evening seminar sponsored by one of the educational services that administer the dreaded McCarthy Scales of Children's Abilities, a "psychometric tool for defining intelligence," otherwise known as an I.Q. test. Most private schools require the test for applicants to pre-kindergarten through first grade (older kids move on to different tests). Parents panic noisily at the prospect, and their children are apprehensive but generally stoic when the day arrives to go "play special games." The kids of course forget about the test immediately afterward. Their parents have developed ulcers by the time the scores arrive in the mail. Spared the blunt bottom line of an I.Q. figure (that goes only to the schools), they receive five separate percentile rankings that can be all but impossible to interpret and very easy to worry about—not least when the numbers fail to jibe with the evaluation that Mom and Dad slaved over for the school application. A low score on, say, the "Motor Scale" (the part of the test that "assesses coordination as the child performs a variety of gross and fine motor tasks") can make you feel a little sheepish that when asked to single out your child's strengths, you effused about her grace on jungle gyms and her agility with crayons.



AS MIGHT BE EXPECTED, THE PARents who came to the testing seminar (most of them clutching their kids' scores) were tense. But the evening took an unexpected turn. The meeting, conducted by the president of the educational services outfit, was devoted to "poking holes," as she put it, in the test. I.Q.s aren't fixed, she emphasized at the start, and you could almost hear the sighs of relief in the room. I.Q. tests are best at predicting how well kids do on I.Q. tests, she went on. They reward "convergent" as opposed to "divergent" thinking. The boy who, when asked to describe a diamond, said, "It's like a dog," did not get any points, even when he explained his cryptic comparison: "A dog is a man's best friend." By this time we had all loosened up a little. She then held up the red scoring manual for the test—"the McCarthy Bible," she said wryly—and flipped to the page with instructions for evaluating the "draw-a-child" subtest on the "Motor Scale." Only hair that actually connects to the head earns a child points, she explained, pointing to the biblical examples of acceptable and unacceptable artistic styles. If your kid drew curly hair *and* every corkscrew neatly joined the circle of the head, he got extra points. As for a hat perfectly perched on impeccable hair, that would catapult him off the charts. Suddenly everyone in the room was looking positively smug: since it was obvious that the psychometricians would never recognize a great artist, who cared what they had to say about our own little Picassos?

BARNEY, THE PURPLE TYRANNOsaurus who has enthralled all Americans between the ages of 1 and 6, has become (along with the Berenstain Bears) the baby boomers' symbol of the generation gap. I've never met a parent who is anything but nauseated by the T.V. show (which he or she has managed to sit through, on average, once), and I've yet to meet a kid who doesn't worship the goofy guy and want to watch him daily. It's easy to explain the adult antipathy: Barney makes Mickey Mouse look in retrospect like a master of irony, and the kids on the set make their Romper Room counterparts seem amazingly unaffected. The juvenile adulation is a lot harder to fathom, since in my experience patently phony grown-ups like Barney make kids nervous, and patently phony boys and girls like Barney's friends make kids suspicious. Try asking a fan for enlightenment, and you'll be disappointed: he'll give you that "if you have to ask" shrug and turn away. It's tempting to make dire pronouncements about how the show, which yammers on about love and imagination, is debasing the currencies of both. But I'll settle for complaining about the show's lack of bite on the most trivial, literal level. What bugs me are Barney's teeth, or rather lack of them. Where any self-respecting tyrannosaurus would have meat-tearing incisors, Barney has two smooth strips of white shirt cardboard—a mouth that looks like a clerical collar. Obviously the program's creators didn't want their hero to be too scary, but couldn't they at least have drawn in some cud-chewing chiclets? I know I sound like an unimaginative parent. But I bet PBS and the program's goody-goody producers would get to work on teeth if they understood the potential influence of that vacant grin: a moronic mouth like Barney's would never earn any points on the McCarthy Scales.

ANN HULBERT

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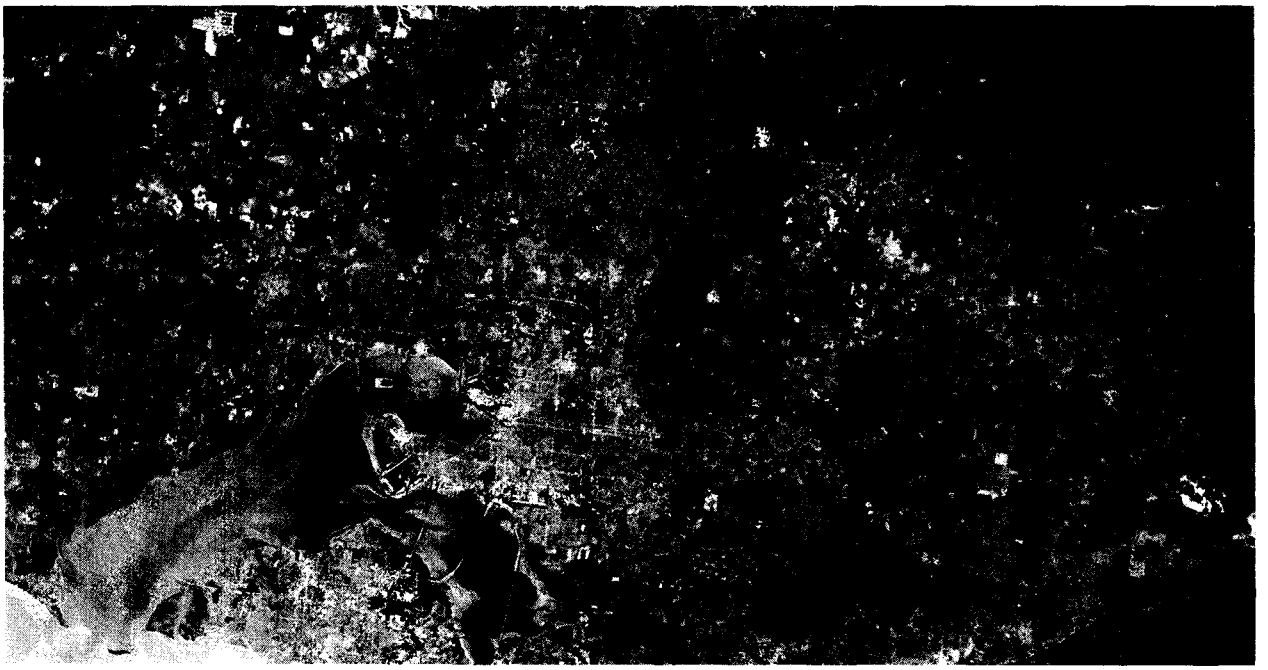

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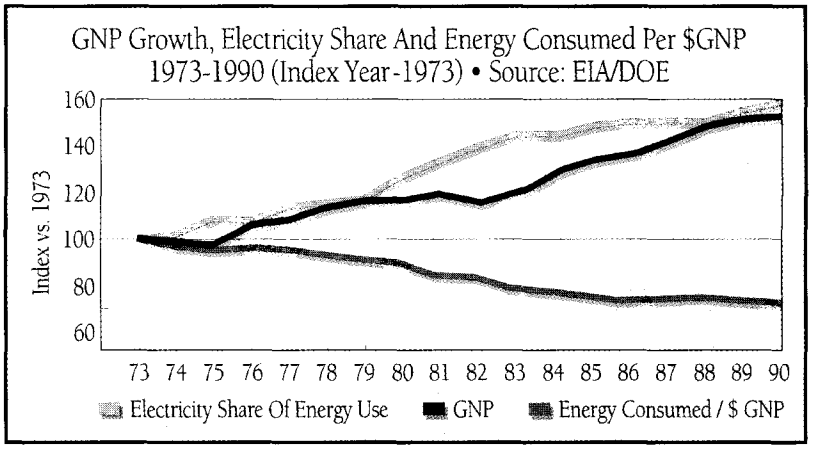
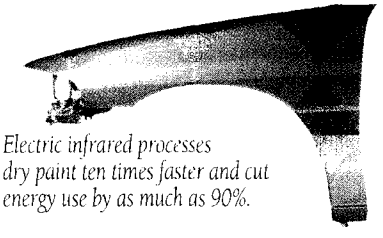

GNP Growth, Electricity Share And Energy Consumed Per $GNP
1973-1990 (Index Year-1973) • Source: EIA/DOE
Index vs. 1973
160
140
120
100
80
60
73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90
Electricity Share Of Energy Use
GNP
Energy Consumed / $ GNP

Advances in electric technologies are enabling us to be more energy efficient while achieving greater economic output.



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